

# *The Three Conceited Kittens*

A Collection of Stories for Children

BY YEN WEN-CHING





# **The Three Conceited Kittens**

A COLLECTION OF STORIES FOR CHILDREN

**Yen Wen-ching**

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## Foreword

I like to dream. Because of my love for dreams and fantasies, I have written some stories and fables for Chinese children. Over a dozen years ago, some of these were translated into English and published in the magazine *Chinese Literature*; two also appeared in book form published by the Foreign Languages Press. Now these translations have been compiled in this volume. If young readers abroad enjoy reading it, I shall feel very pleased.

I am still not too old. I mean to write more and, I hope, better works for children.

To my mind, good stories for children are pictures without pictorial form or poetry without poetic form. These pictures or poems filled with fantasy have a charm all their own. Though they often describe things which do not exist or are irrational, they can help readers to understand real life and heighten their perception, turning their thoughts to progress and making them aspire after better things rather than remain content with what is commonplace or downright ugly. Good children's stories inspire them with ideals as well as courage. The main characters in them often go to the ends of the earth, defying all manner of hardships, journeying fearlessly through the skies or underground to seek happiness and the truth. Good children's stories teach that nothing in

the world is beyond our reach, and men can work all kinds of miracles. Some great writers in the past wrote many beautiful tales for us by making use of these features, which charm us into reading them again and again.

However, the march of time enriches men's imagination, deepens their understanding and gives them higher ideals. In this new age of ours we need different stories. We need to produce a wealth of good children's stories with distinctive new features both in content and form.

One type of new stories we need is about how children from different lands and of different nationalities overcome their prejudices and misunderstandings and become good friends. Their heroes and heroines explore new territory, brave new dangers and take part in new battles. After many setbacks they finally discover a new ideal world. I believe that such stories will be written, but perhaps only if many young readers today take an active part in the writing.

Let us increase our mutual understanding and become friends. This may take time, but it is not simply a beautiful fantasy — it can certainly be achieved.

*Yen Wen-ching*

June 1978, Peking

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# Next-Time Port

## 1. In Which We Start with Tang Hsiao-hsi

This story is called Next-Time Port. In other words, it's a story about a port. Why should a port have a name like that? Why should the boats sail next time? What does it mean? It is a good thing or not? Suppose you wanted to sail a little earlier?

Don't be in such a hurry. Let's start with a boy called Tang Hsiao-hsi.

Hsi was in the fourth form at primary school — in other words he was ten at the time of this story. He was a very thin boy, with a big head and long, skinny legs. He didn't look too strong, the way he kept yawning during his homework, but the moment he started playing he had plenty of energy and looked fit for anything. His arithmetic and Chinese weren't too good: he was always getting "3"\* for one or the other. Yet you couldn't really

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\* Marks in Chinese schools are graded from 5 to 1. 5 is full mark. 3 is a passing mark.

call him stupid, because he could skate and swim, or play football, or catch fish with his hands or a line, hit sparrows with his catapult, catch insects, mould things out of clay, carve figures on his desk with a penknife, and make cardboard masks in which he looked like some fierce hero of old. In fact, he could do pretty well everything that boys of ten like doing.

As he was so fond of playing that he could never have enough of it, his elder sister, Mei, called him Can't Play Enough. Naturally Hsi didn't approve of this nickname. If you asked him, it wasn't a case of playing too much or never playing enough, but of playing too little and always being interrupted. Look at all those games of football in which he was just racing down the field or about to shoot when the bell went. Or those times after supper when he was shouldering his home-made wooden rifle and fighting with the boys in the backyard — maybe in the middle of a charge — when it suddenly grew dark and mother would make him go home to do his homework. Even on Sundays things weren't exactly to his liking. One Sunday afternoon, for example, he went out of the city to fish. He hadn't been sitting long by the pool, and had only a few sticklebacks and sprats in his jar with one or two measly minnows — not even a single bream — when Mei loomed up behind him.

Goodness knows how she had found him. She started lecturing him immediately.

"You really have no sense of time! Do you know it's nearly six?"

"So what?" retorted Hsi crossly. "I'm not afraid of you, you little old woman!"

He was rather put out all the same. For some time now there had seemed to be a voice nagging at him from morning till night: "Six, half past seven, quarter past eight, twelve o'clock! . . ." In other words: "Get up, go to school, time for class, another class, lunch-time, dinner-time! . . ." His form master, mother and Mei seemed to go out of their way to bother him. It really made him furious.

But whether he was furious or not, there was always someone to say: "Quarter to two, quarter past four, half past nine, twenty-five to ten! . . ."

Gradually Hsi realized that there was a peculiar thing which liked nothing better than making trouble for him and spoiling his fun. It was a queer invisible thing called Time, and it was the worst of the lot. It was obviously Time that was bossing his form master, and mother and Mei, and making them boss him. And yet Mei kept saying to him: "Keep your eye on the time! Keep your eye on the time!" as if Hsi could boss Time.

What was behind all this? If Time was something you could keep an eye on, what was it really like, and what made it such a nuisance?

Of course, Hsi wasn't really worried by these problems, and didn't have to cudgel his brains to solve them. If he were allowed to handle Mei's alarm clock, he would have the answers at once. Wasn't all time packed away in big and small clocks?

But Mei never let him touch her clock. It was a small red clock which stood on her desk, and really looked great fun.

Once when Mei was out, Hsi couldn't resist quietly picking it up.

First he just rubbed the glass with one hand. Yes, that was where Time lived, inside there where a heart seemed to be beating. As there was no one about, he slowly stretched out his other hand.

He turned the clock over and examined the bells carefully, as well as the long hand, the short hand, and the keys. "How did Time get in here?" he wondered. "And what else is there inside?"

There was no one to answer him. The clock just went on ticking softly: tick, tock, tick, tock.

He longed to open it and have a look, but the thought of how angry Mei would be frightened him off. Then he had a good idea.

"I'll just try out the bell to see what makes it ring," he said under his breath. "I'm not going to spoil it. . . . No one could blame me for that."

He turned the clock upside down and took hold of a key, but it was too stiff to turn. He tried another key. This one turned all right, but the bell did not ring. Then he tried the key in the middle, muttering: "That's funny. Those two thingamies are dumb — not a sound out of them."

There was suddenly a shrill ringing.

"Ting-ling-ling-ling! Ting-ling-ling-ling! . . ."

Hsi jumped with fright, forgetting Mei was out, dropped the clock on the desk and rushed out of the room. The alarm went on shouting after him, as if to tell the whole house how naughty he had been.

## **2. The Little Man in the Clock**

Hsi had been right. Time did live in the clock, and a curious little creature he was too. A few days later Hsi saw him for himself and they had a talk, in fact the two of them quarrelled.

It happened on Saturday evening.

On Saturday afternoon mother had bought tickets for Hsi and Mei to see a cartoon called *The Adventures of the Black Bear* after supper.

Hsi didn't know this though, and after school he went with two friends to buy stamps. They didn't stay long in the stamp shop, and after buying some stamps they went straight home, just stopping in front of a few shop windows on the way. Yet funnily enough he didn't get home till after six. Mother was very annoyed. And Mei chose this moment to tell her how bad Hsi's marks had been recently. Mother asked at once for his mark book. Yes, during the last fortnight Hsi hadn't got a single 5. He had managed a 4 for Chinese, but had got 3 again for his arithmetic homework. Then mother discovered that he had not been doing his sums properly. She wouldn't let him go to the cinema, but said he must make up his sums between supper and nine o'clock.

Before setting off for the film, Mei thought she would comfort Hsi, but soon she was lecturing him again. She put the clock on his table.

"I'll let you use my clock this evening," she said. "But you must be on your honour and do your sums properly till nine o'clock — this will be a test for you. This is all because you were lazy, you know. That's why mother won't let you go to the film this evening. You really must show more sense of responsibility. . . ." She warmed more and more to her subject. If she hadn't been afraid

of being late for the film, goodness knows when she would have stopped.

Hsi felt it was most unfair. On most days he would have made a scene, because he was sure he had done nothing wrong, but when mother was angry it didn't do to make excuses. After Mei had gone he sat down in front of the clock.

After several yawns and a great effort of will, he found his arithmetic book. Slowly he copied out:

"Yesterday the grain depot handled 165 sacks of beans. . . ."

He stopped there. He was not interested in the grain depot. Somehow or other it was only too easy to imagine himself in the cinema with the rest of the audience. On the screen a big, clumsy black bear stood up like a human being, and started padding along on its hind legs. Then it slowly started to dance. After that he saw all sorts of amusing puppets, fighting and tumbling over each other. But before he could get a good look at them they disappeared. He had heard from his friends what fun *The Adventures of the Black Bear* was, and told his mother about it twice before she would buy the tickets. Now his chance was gone. Mother probably wouldn't buy him another ticket. It really was too bad. He imagined Mei sitting watching by herself with a smug

smile on her face. That reminded him of the lecture she had just given him.

Tearing a page from his exercise book, he set about drawing a caricature of Mei. He made her worse-looking than she was. First of all, he gave her an enormous mouth. That was to show that she liked telling tales. Then he drew a pointed nose. That was to show how sharp she was. As a matter of fact, Mei's nose was rather pointed, but not as pointed as he made it. When the drawing was finished it didn't look like her, so he rubbed it out and started again. After he had done this several times, the result was a huge, smudgy black nose. He hadn't done this on purpose, mind you. Then he spent a long time giving her a lot of tangled hair, a regular bird's nest. For fear no one would recognize who this was, he wrote at one side: "This is Mei." Now people would know that this was his sister and not some other girl. Last of all, he drew two lines from her mouth around a lot of dots and a large exclamation mark. That, it goes without saying, was to show how she lectured people.

"Tick, tock, tick, tock, tick, tock. . . ."

The clock was suddenly ticking very loudly. Hsi had a look at it. It was three minutes to seven, and he hadn't yet finished a single sum. He hastily copied out a few more words:



“. . . The number of sacks of rice. . . .”

He suddenly remembered the Hungarian stamps he had bought. Were they still there? He just had to get his notebook out of his pocket and look at those stamps with dogs on them.

He started admiring them. What splendid dogs they were, and what jolly colours! Last time he had tried to swop two Japanese stamps with Tieh-so for one of these, and Tieh-so had refused. Now Hsi had some of his own, and if Tieh-so came asking for Japanese stamps he wouldn't swop with him. Tomorrow he'd see which of them had the best Hungarian stamps.

He fetched his album from the cupboard. As the stamps seemed in rather a mess, he began to sort them. But that was no easy job. Which country did this one belong to? He finally just stuck them in anyhow.

“Tick, tock, tick, tock, tick, tock! . . .”

The clock was nagging at him again. Hsi saw it was thirteen minutes past eight. He scribbled quickly:

“. . . 8 times as many as the beans. The total of rice. . . .”

The next moment his eye fell on the picture of Mei. It struck him that she was very like their math teacher, Miss Wang, in many ways. Miss Wang was a real terror, always glaring at people,

and Mei was always ticking him off. It was hard to understand all Miss Wang said, and Mei liked to use all sorts of new terms too. Of course there were some differences. Miss Wang wore glasses for short sight, and Mei had never worn glasses. If he added a pair, she would look more like a little old woman than ever, and almost as ugly as Miss Wang. "That's it! That's the way!" Hsi drew in the glasses, chuckling to himself.

He was just in the mood for drawing. After Mei's glasses he drew a small black bear by her, a tin soldier, a puppy, a plump duck, and whole rows of puppets, too many to count. He drew one after another, meaning to make a play out of them.

"Tick, tock, tick, tock, tick, tock! . . ." called the clock again, even more loudly this time.

Hsi looked up, but before he could see the time there was a click and the back of the clock swung open. Before he knew what was happening, a little man shot out of the clock. He dashed furiously towards Hsi, shouting:

"*You are the limit!*"

Hsi remembered seeing a little man like this in some fairy tale. He had on a pointed hat and checked overalls like a clown. His voice was very clear, and his face was like a child's except that he had a beard.

"This must be Time," thought Hsi. "He's angry because I've been drawing for so long."

"I was just drawing for a few minutes," he hastily explained.

Time shook his head violently.

"Don't tell lies! Do you think I don't know what you've been up to?"

"Honestly, I'm not lying." Hsi felt nervous. "I haven't done anything bad. I was just drawing for a bit. And I went through my stamps — that's all. I'm going to do my arithmetic now."

Time went on shaking his head.

"I don't believe it. I don't believe it! What other mischief have you been up to? Out with it now!"

"Why should I tell you?" Hsi was getting angry too. "Mind your own business!"

"This is my business."

"It isn't."

"It is."

"It isn't, so there!"

They shouted back and forth till Time was nearly speechless with rage and seemed ready to cry.

"All right, I wash my hands of you!" he shouted. "I'm going. You can do what you like, and play as long as you like. You say it's none of my business, and I'm sure I don't want to have

anything to do with you. Being with you nearly drives me off my head. Do you think I can't play, or don't like playing? I'm going off now to enjoy myself. Goodbye!"

With this Time took a few wheels out of the clock, and quickly fitted them together like a bicycle. He jumped lightly into the saddle, took off his hat and waved it at Hsi with a final: "I'm off."

Hsi wanted him to wait while he thought things over, but before he could say a word Time went on:

"I'm not coming back. Not unless you ask me, that is. Goodbye."



He whizzed up to the window-sill on his bicycle, did some stunt riding there, and shot straight up the window-frame to disappear through the hole left for the chimney of the stove.

The moment Time disappeared the clock stopped ticking. Hsi picked it up and gave it a few hard shakes, but still it made no sound. He tapped the two bells, but they were silent too. The clock was dumb.

"That's done it," thought Hsi. "Mei won't know that Time left off his own bat. Suppose she tells mother I broke her clock?! . . ."

### **3. The Picture of Mei Is Angry Too**

While he was worrying about what Mei would do, his drawing of her sat up. This Mei was uglier than his real sister, and more of a spoil-sport too. Pointing an accusing finger at him, she asked:

"Why has the clock stopped?"

"I don't know," said Hsi. "I didn't do it."

"You must have!" The drawing flared up. "It must have been you! I'm going to tell mother. I'm going to tell Miss Wang too, and Mr. Chang and Miss Li. You didn't do your arithmetic. . . ."

"Please don't tell them. I'll do it now."

Mei shook her head so that her tousled hair flapped.

"I don't believe you! You've no intention of doing it. You've broken my clock and annoyed Time so much that he's gone away, and you don't mean ever to go to school again. . . ."

With her huge mouth, this Mei was a worse windbag than his real sister. She went straight on, and he couldn't get a word in. Touching her glasses she scolded:

"And another thing — why make me such a sight? Do I really look like this?"

The sight of her big black nose and all that matted hair made Hsi very uncomfortable.

"I didn't do it on purpose. I can't draw hair. . . ."

Mei produced a comb and tidied her hair as she went on lecturing him:

"Why don't you learn to draw properly? Your arithmetic is no good, neither is your drawing. Your Chinese is no good either. You're not good in any of your subjects! You just bully smaller children and make trouble. I'm going to tell mother. I really am!"

"Oh, don't! Please don't!" Hsi was properly frightened now. "I'll never draw you again, I promise I won't!"

"Oh, no!" Mei glared at him. "I've got to tell. You don't do your homework, you spoil my clock, you scribble silly pictures, you dirty your exercise book, and you answer me back all the time! . . ."

There was nothing Hsi could do — he couldn't get round this Mei he had drawn. Upset and angry, he took to his heels while Mei shouted after him:

"Stop! Where are you going?"

He rushed away without a look behind.

Outside it was too dark to see a thing. Yet oddly enough he didn't bump into anything, nor did he fall down. He dashed along, afraid Mei would catch up with him.

He ran as if he had wings till someone called:

"Hsi! Hurry up and go to the film!"

As soon as Hsi heard there was a film, he forgot everything unpleasant that had happened.

"What film?" he asked, stopping.

"A good one, a cartoon. There's a splendid football match in it. Get a move on! If you're late, there'll be no seats left."

Hsi couldn't tell from the voice who it was speaking.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Me."

Still Hsi didn't know who it was.

"Who's 'me'?"

"It's me, silly. Don't you know an old pal?"

Hsi walked over. He had never set eyes on this old pal before. This was the first person to befriend him since Time had left him. But can you guess who it was?

#### 4. Grey Rat

It was Grey Rat. Normally Hsi couldn't have had such a friend, but now that Time had gone, all sorts of odd things were happening, and this was one of them — Hsi had met Grey Rat whom he didn't know was his friend.

Though Grey Rat wasn't too old, he had a few whiskers. From the way he kept doubling up you couldn't tell whether he was extra polite or simply afraid of the cold.

"How is it I don't know you?" asked Hsi.

"What d'you mean?" Grey Rat smacked his lips. "You know me. I'm Grey Rat. They call me Never Enough. You're Hsi, and they call you Can't Play Enough. . . ."

Hsi promptly corrected him huffily:

"I'm not Can't Play Enough. My name is Hsi."

"Never mind! It's all the same. Don't you remember your old pal?"

"I seem to remember you." Hsi felt he must have seen this creature somewhere. "Are you really a rat?"



Grey Rat winked his beady eyes rapidly.

"I certainly am. I'm certainly not, I mean. I'm a toy rat. I'm such a good sort that everyone likes me. Have you forgotten how much you like me?"

Hsi remembered that he did have a toy like this. His rat had an elastic band. If you wound this up, it could run about by itself.

"Do I honestly like you very much?" he asked.

"Of course! Come on and play."

"Where shall we go?"

"To Happy Land. You can't imagine anywhere more amusing and better fun. There are so many toys you can choose whatever you like, and play as long as you like. And there's no need to do arithmetic."

Hsi was decidedly pleased.

"Are there films there?" he asked.

"Plenty. You can see as many as you like. There's a swimming pool too, and a skating rink, and. . . ."

Hsi wasn't at all annoyed now with Grey Rat.

"Honest to goodness?" he asked. "Well, what are we waiting for?"

Grey Rat looked him slowly over from head to foot.

"It won't do." He shook his head. "They won't let you in like that!"

"Why not?" Hsi was taken aback.

"Don't get excited. It's all right. All you need do is change your shadow."

"Really and truly?" Hsi jumped for joy.

"I wouldn't deceive you," replied Grey Rat solemnly.

Then he told Hsi that Happy Land was where all the toys lived. But the toys couldn't stand children, who were always teasing them. So they were all against letting children in. As soon as they saw a child coming, they shut and barred the gate. If Hsi put on a toy shadow, though, they would take him for a toy and let him in. Of course, this was a trick. But instead of thinking carefully, Hsi asked:

"Will you change your shadow too?"

"I don't have to." Grey Rat winked his beady eyes again. "I'm a toy to begin with, not a boy. Toys don't have to change, only children. As you're a boy, you must change. Otherwise you can't go in and play."

Hsi didn't suppose there was much to this business of changing shadows, and he was very keen to go in. He'd do it!

"What sort of shadow will you give me?" he asked. "Not anything too big, I hope."

"There aren't any big ones, don't worry. I'll find you a smart little shadow."

Suddenly Hsi thought of something. He had never changed shadows before, but he had had a tooth out.

"Does changing shadows hurt?" he asked.

"No, not at all." Grey Rat grabbed one of his legs. "It's just a question of a small operation."

### **5. The Shadow Who Could Talk**

Grey Rat promptly produced a pair of scissors, with which he started to cut off Hsi's shadow. It hardly hurt at all, that was a fact. It was just a little ticklish, so that Hsi felt like giggling. In less than no time Grey Rat cut Hsi's shadow from his heels, and it thrashed about like a fish that has just been landed. To tell the truth, Hsi had never paid any attention to his shadow before, and had no idea that it was alive. He was wondering rather unhappily what to do, when Grey Rat picked up his shadow, crumpled it like torn paper and threw it away. Then he produced another from his pocket, and attached this quickly to Hsi's heels.

Straightening up, he admired Hsi's new shadow.

"Look at yourself," he said. "What a smart shadow you've got now! Whoever sees this shadow will think you're a handsome clay doll."

Hsi looked down and was shocked by what he saw. His new shadow was a long one. Though not too big, it was horribly ugly — a cross between a rat and a skinny old man.

"This horrid thing isn't one bit like me!" he cried. "Look it's got whiskers — how nasty!"

"You're the one who's ugly! Why should I look like you? You're you, I'm me!"

Hsi was staggered to hear his shadow speak up loudly. He had never known shadows could talk. And this shadow had a voice like a goat, an extremely powerful voice.

"Don't be angry," Hsi put in nervously. "All I said. . . ."

The shadow cut him short with a loud bleat:

"What d'you mean by 'All I said'? Just keep your mouth shut. I'd have you know that we are equals. That means you can't say whatever you please about me. In fact, that's not all — you must do as I say."

"Do as you say?" muttered Hsi. "I'll have to think that over."

"There's no time for that. You just do as I say!"

"Don't start bickering now," urged Grey Rat. "Hsi's got a smart, intelligent new shadow, better than any other shadow. Hsi's a good boy. He'll do as his shadow says."

That kept the shadow quiet for the moment. But he was remarkably talkative. Presently he started bleating impatiently:

"When are we going? How dull it is standing here! Weren't you talking just now of going somewhere to play. . . ."

"To Happy Land," put in Hsi.

"Hold your tongue!" snapped the shadow. "I know. We're going to play in Happy Land. Get a move on then. Let's start."

"Don't be so impatient," said Grey Rat. "We're going."

## 6. On the Way

So they set out. If you hadn't read the first part of this story and met them on the road, you would think there were only two of them: Hsi and Grey Rat (nobody would take the shadow for a person). But we know there were three of them: Hsi, Grey Rat, and a bad-tempered, talkative shadow. They walked on



and on down a long, long road.

Hsi had a lot of trouble with his new shadow on the way. It was so heavy for one thing. (This was another difference between this new shadow and his old one, which had weighed nothing at all.) Dragging this shadow along was like wearing father's waterproof boots — each step cost quite an effort. When Hsi slowed down, the shadow nagged at him. And when he walked so fast that he started perspiring, the shadow still grumbled at him:

“Faster! Faster!”

Yet when Hsi went faster the shadow complained again:

“Why go so fast? Do you want to tear me to pieces?”

“Yes, Hsi, do be more careful,” said Grey Rat. Presently the shadow bleated again:

“How inconsiderate you are! You're kicking up so much dirt that you've made me quite filthy!”

“I didn't mean to,” Hsi apologized. “I'll be more careful next time.”

So the three of them went along. In that murky half light it was hard to tell whether they were in a lane, a valley or a forest. They rounded one corner after another and travelled on and on, exactly how far or how long it was hard to say.

"How long does it take to get there?" asked Hsi, whose legs were beginning to ache. "We've been walking for hours and hours."

"Oh, no!" said Grey Rat.

"He's afraid!" sniggered the shadow. "He's afraid!"

"I'm tired," retorted Hsi. "We must have walked for several hours at least."

"You're wrong," said Grey Rat coldly. "There's no Time now, so no one keeps track of the hours. It doesn't matter how long you walk."

"That's right," agreed the shadow. "We can walk as long as we like. I'm not tired, yet you say you're tired. What bosh!"

"I'm carrying you along," objected Hsi crossly. "You don't have to do a thing. Of course you're not tired. I'd have you know my legs are aching."

"Stop bickering now," said Grey Rat. "I'll teach you a spell which will stop you feeling tired."

*Say I'm tired, and you're a fool;  
Sweets and soda after school!*

There's another spell to stop your legs from aching:

*They don't ache! They don't ache!  
I'll play football in the break!*

And I know another to make you tired — want to hear it?"

"No, no spells like that," put in Hsi quickly.  
He started chanting the other two:

*Say I'm tired, and you're a fool;  
Sweets and soda after school!  
They don't ache! They don't ache!  
I'll play football in the break!*

Reciting these several times did make him feel much better. So the three of them went on through the dusk, turned to the east, turned to the west, and travelled on and on.

After some time the shadow said:

"Grey Rat, teach me that spell to make people tired. It's so dull not being tired at all."

"All right." Grey Rat nodded. "Here it is:

*Tiredness, tiredness, here it comes!  
Swot for exams and do your sums!"*

This reminded Hsi of something.

"Oh, dear! I still haven't done my arithmetic."

"There you go again," sneered the shadow.  
"What a coward you are. If I were you, I'd just refuse to do it!"

"Never mind," Grey Rat consoled him. "You can do it next time just as well."

"Mother will scold me," said Hsi.

"You *are* the limit!" exclaimed Grey Rat.  
"You mustn't be afraid when your mother scolds



you. She can't be really angry with you. Have you forgotten the sweets and toys she once bought you after a scolding?"

"But there's my sister too. . . ."

"That little old woman!" bleated the shadow loudly. "No need to be afraid of her! Draw a big cartoon of her on the blackboard to show all her classmates, and then see if she dares go on lecturing you!"

"Yes," said Grey Rat. "A very good idea."

"All right then," said Hsi. "I'll just play this once, not next time."

"Right!" cried Grey Rat and the shadow together. "Just this once. Of course you won't play next time."

## **7. Next-Time Port**

So the three of them went on through the dusk, turned to the east, turned to the west, and travelled on and on. Then — what time it was no one knows — they came to Happy Land.

This place had another odd name, which was Next-Time Port. It really was a rather peculiar place. There were a great many boats by the wharf: steamers, steam launches, yachts, trawlers, cargo boats, everything down to skiffs with two

paddles, but not one of them was moving. There was scarcely any smoke coming from the steamers. The wisps of smoke in one or two funnels were like smoke in a picture, quite still, not rising or falling. It was the same with the yachts. Most of the masts were bare, but one or two were half-reefed, with their sails quite still. What could this mean?

"Why?" asked Hsi. "Why are none of these boats moving?"

"Need you ask?" The shadow gave an unpleasant laugh. "You really are a fat-head."

"The boats here don't move," said Grey Rat. "In other words, they don't sail."

"You mean they never sail?" asked Hsi.

"That's not what I said! They're not sailing this time, but next time they will. If you don't believe me, wait and see. These boats are sure to sail next time."

Hsi had another look and noticed that the sea here was like ink, black and murky, without any waves or so much as a ripple.

"Why?" he couldn't help asking again. "Why doesn't the water here move?"

"Haven't we told you already?" snapped the shadow. "It's not moving this time, but next time it will."

Hsi looked at the sky. A few clouds were hanging there, each in one fixed place, quite still.

They seemed to have frozen and were thick and heavy, yet none of them came down.

"Those clouds aren't moving either," he remarked. "I suppose they'll move next time too?"

"That's right," said Grey Rat and the shadow together. "Next time."

"Well, what about these flowers?" He was looking at a bush near by, almost stripped of its leaves but with some buds, none of which had opened yet. "Will the flowers come out next time too?"

"Of course not till next time." The shadow took him up short.

"It's always 'next time, next time,' " said Hsi. "When is 'next time' actually?"

"When?" repeated Grey Rat. "Who knows? Have you forgotten that we haven't any time now? So there are no hours, no mornings or evenings, and no days."

That was a funny business — no hours, no mornings or evenings, and no days. While Hsi was puzzling over it he heard a curious regular wheezing, as if someone were working a bellows.

"What's that?" he asked.

Grey Rat listened, and clapped his paws.

"A song, fine! It's Tin Soldier — the best musician here."

"Beautiful!" cried the shadow. "Beautiful! He sings so clearly and with such spirit, it's a treat to hear him."

"Do you call that a song?" asked Hsi after listening for a while. "It sounds like snoring."

"Don't talk rubbish!" protested Grey Rat. "What do you mean by snoring? I hear this almost every night when I come out, more times than I can count. On the nights when I hear this song I have good luck, and everything goes swimmingly. If I don't hear it, or if it stops suddenly, that's very bad. I won't tell you why it's bad. Oh yes, this is a song, we're not deceiving you!"

In the distance Tin Soldier was singing away: "Hu — lu, hu — lu, hu — lu. . . ."

"He's certainly quite a singer," said Hsi, "keeping it up so long without feeling tired."

"I can do that too!" Grey Rat started snoring loudly.

Then the shadow chimed in, like a goat.

## **8. White Porcelain Man**

In front there was a fence. And written in big characters on a brass plate hanging from a pillar was the name Next-Time Port. This was the main entrance. Beside the gate was an iron bed on which

lay a very fat man with his head on a high pillow. Between yawns he was reaching under his pillow for food. This was White Porcelain Man. As soon as he saw Hsi and the others, he shouted:

"Keep out! Keep out! Tin Soldier told me to keep guard here. Only his friends can go in."

Grey Rat stepped forward and said:

"Wohoyo! (This was White Porcelain Man's name.) Don't you remember me? I'm a good friend of Tin Soldier."

White Porcelain Man peered at him from the corner of his eye.

"I remember!" he said with another yawn. "You're Never Enough. We're good friends. How I've missed you! Are you well? No question about it, of course you can go in. But don't make me talk too much. My health isn't good and I mustn't talk too much. So, dear friend, I can only tell you very simply, in other words, shortly and briefly, that I am now trying to reduce and to lose five pounds, no more and no less. I'm sure you realize that to lose five pounds isn't an easy business, not easy at all. So I have to get more sleep, or at least more rest. And I have to eat specially well. I'm tired out with all this sleeping, resting, eating and drinking. Dear me! I'm afraid I can only give you a general idea like this. There are many other troubles that I can't

go into now. It's a fact, a great many doctors have advised me to reduce by five pounds, no more and no less, and the way is to sleep and eat more. That's why. . . ."

He reached under his pillow for another handful of sweets, and stuffed them into his mouth till his cheeks bulged.

"If you go on eating like that you'll get fatter and fatter," said Hsi.

White Porcelain Man glared at him, and went straight on:

"Who are you? I don't know you. I doubt if you're my friend, in fact I'm sure you're not. Do you know who I am? I'm Wohoyo, White Porcelain Man. Everybody knows Wohoyo, Tin Soldier's friend. Do you believe me? Right, silence means agreement. As Tin Soldier's friend I can't make mistakes, not any mistakes at all. Dear me! You shouldn't make me talk so much. My health isn't good enough to talk a lot. So I can only tell you very simply — as simply as I told my good friend Grey Rat just now — I must eat more to lose weight. In other words . . . dear me! What was I saying? Oh, I remember. You've made me talk so much again that I'm tired out. I can't admit a bad character like you. Besides, what's more important, I don't know you. Grey Rat is Tin Soldier's good friend, and my good friend as well. He knows

me, and I know him. Of course he can go in. But you can't."

"Let him in!" begged Grey Rat. "His name is Hsi. He hates doing sums, and he's a good friend of ours."

This made White Porcelain Man quite pleased again.

"I know! I know! This is Can't Play Enough. I know him. He can go in, that's all right! This is a fine place where you've nothing to do but play, and there's no need to do any work. But what worries me a little is that he's not a toy yet. Has he changed shadows?"

"Yes, he has!" put in the shadow before Hsi could say a word. "I'm an old shadow, and. . . ."

"And a smart one," added Grey Rat. "He's Hsi's new shadow."

"No!" protested the shadow. "I'm not his shadow at all. I'm not like him in the least. I don't do as he says, and he has to do as I say. He's practically *my* shadow!"

"I'm not!" objected Hsi crossly. "I'm not your shadow. If you talk like that I'll get rid of you."

"You dare! You dare!" screamed the shadow. White Porcelain Man roared with laughter.

"Never mind, never mind!" he said. "It

doesn't matter which of you is the shadow. Come on! First come in and have a nap."

"He doesn't like naps," said Grey Rat. "He likes to play."

"To play?" said White Porcelain Man. "All right, go and play. You can sleep later."

He opened the gate in the fence, and let them in.

## 9. Hsi Teaches Arithmetic

This was a world of toys, just as Grey Rat had said. The first things Hsi and the others saw when they went in were Baby Bear and Velvet Duck. Of course they were both toys. But in one way they were rather like Hsi — they didn't like homework either. There had been a time when sums gave Baby Bear toothache, and a difficult problem gave Velvet Duck a pain in her legs. So one day, like Hsi, they left home and came to this place where it was all play and no work. Yet when Hsi met them they were doing a sum. Do you know why? Well, they had played with everything here till they were tired of all the toys and wanted a change.

"Let's play at arithmetic," said Baby Bear.

"Oh yes! That's a new game," agreed Velvet Duck.



Hsi found them squatting with bent heads by a sand pit, drawing one circle after another.

"What are you drawing?" he asked.

"Big apples," said Baby Bear.

"Pah!" sneered the shadow. "They're not round. They don't look like apples at all!"

"Don't talk like that!" Hsi stopped him hastily.

Baby Bear and Velvet Duck didn't know that Hsi had a shadow that could talk. They thought what the shadow had said and what Hsi had said to the shadow had been said to them by Hsi.

"What!" Baby Bear was annoyed. "Why ask a question if you won't let us answer?"

"Who are you?" asked Velvet Duck crossly. "Rude, stuck-up thing!"

"I'm so sorry," Hsi apologized. "I'm Hsi. I'm not really stuck-up, and I didn't mean you just now. I simply wanted to ask why you are drawing so many apples."

"This is a sum, you see," said Velvet Duck.

"An arithmetic sum," explained Baby Bear. "A hard one! Mother brings in four plates of apples. There are two on each plate. . . ."

This time the shadow kept quiet, but Grey Rat put in:

"Why play at arithmetic? That's no fun."

"It is fun!" cried Baby Bear and Velvet Duck.

"All right. Let's do it together," suggested Hsi. "What else does the sum say?"

"It's like this," said Velvet Duck after some thought. "Six apples are given to the little boys. How many apples are left?"

"There are only two apples to each plate," said Baby Bear. "That's not enough to give the little boys six."

It seemed so easy that Hsi decided to help them.

"How silly you are!" he said. "Oh . . . sorry! I'm sorry! Don't be cross. Didn't you tell me there were four plates of apples, in other words eight apples? That's enough, isn't it?"

The shadow yawned, and Grey Rat yawned after him.

"Are there as many as eight?" asked Velvet Duck. "How many boys are there? The sum doesn't say."

Hsi nearly lost patience again.

"If the sum doesn't say, we needn't bother about it."

"How can we work out the answer then?" asked Baby Bear.

"Don't work it out," Grey Rat gave another yawn. "There's no point in working it out."

Baby Bear was a stubborn little fellow. The more you argued with him, the more set on a thing

he became. When his teacher told him not to play, he simply had to play. And now that Grey Rat told him not to do this sum, he simply had to do it.

"We're going to work it out!" he shouted. "It's fun!"

"It's fun! It's fun!" cried Velvet Duck.

Grey Rat disliked arithmetic so much that when he heard this he yawned twice running.

"All right, it's fun. Get on with it," he said. "I've rather a headache, so I'll go on ahead to rest for a while with my friend Tin Soldier. See you later!"

He went off on his own.

"Grey Rat isn't a good student," said Velvet Duck. "Just hearing the word arithmetic gives him a headache. I used to be like that. Talk of arithmetic. . . ."

"Made your legs ache!" cried Baby Bear. "My teeth used to ache. Later even my fur ached."

"What! What!" cried Velvet Duck. "How can fur ache? Don't be silly!"

The shadow burst out laughing. Baby Bear thought it was Hsi, and said to him:

"What are you laughing at? It's the truth I'm telling you."

"You ought to help, not laugh at us," said Velvet Duck. "It's not kind to laugh at people."

"I didn't laugh." Hsi was terribly embarrassed. "That wasn't me. I wouldn't laugh at you. Anyway, never mind that. Let's do this sum. It's a very easy one. You just have to know your two-times table. I learned that ages ago. Now I can multiply right up to a million."

"My! Aren't you clever!" exclaimed Velvet Duck. "What is a million?"

"Don't be in such a hurry! A million is ever so many twenties. You haven't even learned your two-times table, yet here you are asking about a million. Listen carefully now. This is how you do this sum. . . ."

Hsi cleared his throat to start teaching Velvet Duck and Baby Bear. But having cleared his throat, he found he had nothing to say. He didn't think much of his own arithmetic teacher, but now that he was teaching himself he realized how difficult it was. He cleared his throat again and said:

"For instance, to work out this sum you must first know what method to use: addition, subtraction, multiplication or division. And you must understand the principle. . . ."

"Prince Po?" asked Velvet Duck. "Who's he?"

Hsi had heard his teacher use the word "principle," but he couldn't explain what it meant. He thought for a time, cleared his throat once more, and went on:

"Not 'Prince Po' but 'principle.' A 'principle' is a 'principle.' But let's leave that for the time being. It doesn't matter. You see, you've got to understand that this sum is divided into two steps. . . ."

"What do you mean by 'two steps'?" asked Velvet Duck.

"Don't keep interrupting!" begged Baby Bear.

Hsi thought for a bit, and decided that "two steps" wasn't easy to explain either.

"Right! Don't keep interrupting!" he said. "First draw four plates."

"I'll draw them!" cried Baby Bear.

He promptly traced four circles carefully in the sand.

"That's it," said Hsi. "Those are the four plates. Now draw two apples on the first plate . . . right! And two apples on the second plate . . . right!"

"Hey!" cried Velvet Duck suddenly. "That apple's so big it's going to roll off the plate."

"No, it's not!" growled Baby Bear.

"Never mind if it is or not," said Hsi. "It'll be given away anyway very soon. If you make such a noise I won't go on."

"We won't make a noise. Go on."

Hsi helped Baby Bear to finish drawing the apples, and went on:

"Look, now we'll divide the apples. Six are given to the little boys, aren't they? Then watch: one, two, three, four, five, six. . . ."

As he was counting, he rubbed out the apples on three plates.

"You've given them the plates too!" cried Velvet Duck. "But how many little boys are there really?"

"Didn't I tell you we needn't worry about the number of the boys?" He was losing patience again. "Tell me, how many apples are left?"

"Three," answered Baby Bear promptly.

"Three? Have another look."

Baby Bear and Velvet Duck looked carefully.

"Three!" they shouted together. "Two apples and one plate."

Hsi stood up and sighed.

"You're asked how many apples are left, not how many plates. Aren't there one, two, two apples? Understand?"

Baby Bear said nothing.

"No," said Velvet Duck.

"Why not?" asked Hsi grumpily. "What don't you understand?"

"Who's going to eat those two apples that are left?" asked Velvet Duck with a long yawn.

The shadow burst out laughing again, and said loudly:

"Anyone who likes. Anyone but you two dunces."

## 10. The Skating or Swimming Pool

Before Hsi could silence the shadow, Baby Bear had spotted him.

"My! Hsi's shadow can speak!" he cried.

"Don't say that!" The shadow objected loudly. "I'm not his shadow. He's *mine*!"

"This shadow can talk," said Hsi rather sheepishly. "He's a bit conceited though, and likes to say whatever comes into his head."

"He can speak?" Velvet Duck was staring hard at the shadow. "Does that mean he can sing too?"

"With a voice as loud as that, his singing must sound like a trumpet," said Baby Bear.

The shadow took this as a compliment.

"I sing even better than a trumpet," he said proudly. "I can talk and sing, and I know everything. Because I'm intelligent, most intelligent."

"Do you really know everything?" Velvet Duck took him at his word. "Well then, tell us what to do now after our lesson."

"Go and play, of course."

"Smart chap!" Baby Bear jumped for joy. "He's really intelligent!"

"He *is* clever!" said Velvet Duck. "When we used to play all the time we got tired of it, but after a lesson we feel like playing again."

"Me too," said Hsi. "What shall we play?"

"Anything you like," said the shadow. "I can play at anything. What do you like: skipping, football, cycling, drawing, marbles, climbing trees, catching birds . . . ?"

"I'd like to swim," said Velvet Duck.

"Swimming is fun," said the shadow. "I like the breast-stroke best. I also like the crawl, the back-stroke, the side-stroke, the overarm-stroke, the dragon-fly stroke. . . ."

"There's no such thing as a dragon-fly stroke," put in Velvet Duck.

"Who said so? If I say there is, there is! Anyway all the different strokes are fun. Just getting into the water is fun, and even swallowing a few mouthfuls of cold water is better than drinking hot water."

"I want to skate," said Baby Bear.

"To skate?" said the shadow. "That's even more fun. I love skating. I can do any kind of step you name without falling. And after skating you can play ice hockey or eat bits of ice. . . ."

In his excitement, Hsi interrupted the shadow:



"I like both swimming and skating — what shall I do?"

"That's fine," said the shadow. "You're just like me. You must do whatever I say. I tell you there's a Skating or Swimming Pool here. Half of it is ice, and that's a skating rink. The other half is water, and that's a swimming pool. Velvet Duck can swim there while Baby Bear skates and Hsi and I do both — skate a while then swim a while, swim a while then skate a while."

"Oh, yes! Good!" cried the other three.

"I'll show you the way," continued the shadow. "But promise to do as I say!"

"We will!"

They set out for the Skating or Swimming Pool. On the way the shadow gave loud marching orders:

"Straight on, turn east! Straight on, turn south! Straight on, turn west! Straight on, turn north! Here we are!"

It was true that by going east, south, west and north as the shadow said, they had reached the Skating or Swimming Pool in next to no time.

It was a most extraordinary pool, a huge lake half of which was frozen over, with a great many skates piled beside the ice. The other half was clear water without so much as a speck of ice, and

in it were floating a great many red and green rubber tyres, all well blown up.

Hsi could have jumped for joy. He had never been able to skate and swim at the same time before, but now he could do both. No wonder Grey Rat called this Happy Land — you could have more fun here than anywhere else in the world.

Baby Bear lost no time in putting on a pair of skates and starting skating. Velvet Duck, it goes without saying, dived straight into the water. Hsi was so busy skating and swimming that he got quite tired. He would skate for a while, then swim for a while, skate for a while with Baby Bear, and then jump into the water to swim with Velvet Duck.

This went on and on. As there was no Time, they could do as they liked. And they seemed to have been enjoying themselves for ages, yet also just for a few moments. Finally Hsi got rather tired. And suddenly in the distance he heard a thudding noise: Pu-tung! Pu-tung! Pu-tung!

What ever was that? It sounded something like a machine, though not quite.

Hsi looked up and saw not far from the Skating or Swimming Pool two toys sitting under a small tree. That seemed to be where the thudding noise was coming from. What could they be doing? He ran over to find out.

## 11. Wooden Man and Rubber Dog

One of the toys was a lean and ugly, stiff wooden man, the other a jolly, friendly rubber dog. Wooden Man was crying bitterly, Rubber Dog, most upset, was wiping away his tears.

"How do you do?" Hsi greeted them quietly. Rubber Dog gave a broad grin.

"How do we do? I'm doing very well, thank you. But Wooden Man isn't doing at all well. He's unhappy. Look at him — he's crying."

"I'm not!" Wooden Man rubbed his eyes with his fists. "I wasn't crying."

"You were!" said Rubber Dog. "You were crying a moment ago, and there are still tears in your eyes. I asked you to stop, but you wouldn't."

"I did not cry! Never!" Wooden Man's lips trembled and he burst into tears. He buried his head in his hands, and big tears like pearls rolled down to the ground.

"Look, those are real tears," Rubber Dog told Hsi. "He may be made of wood, but he weeps real tears, real salty tears. He has a real heart too, of real flesh. Listen! You can hear it beating quite distinctly — pu-tung, pu-tung! If you don't believe me, listen. Wooden Man's upset."

Pu-tung, pu-tung, pu-tung! . . .

The thuds were made by Wooden Man's loud heart-beats. Whatever had made him so upset?

As Hsi couldn't think how to comfort him, he said:

"Maybe if you swim for a bit you'll feel better."

"No!" Wooden Man shook his head.

Wooden Man didn't like talking, and usually spoke in half sentences or just one or two words. If his friend Rubber Dog wasn't there to explain what he meant, other people found it hard to understand him.

"He hasn't finished," said Rubber Dog. "He means that swimming would be no use. The more he swam the worse he would feel. Right, Wooden Man?"

Wooden Man nodded.

The shadow, who had been quiet for so long, now bleated suddenly:

"Look at his ugly, gaping mouth! Isn't he a fiend! For shame!"

"It's not good to sneer at people all the time," said Hsi indignantly.

"What?" The shadow was indignant too. "Have you stopped carrying out my orders again? I shall say just what I please! With that huge mouth and those beady eyes, the more he cries the uglier he looks. He is a fright!"

"My!" Rubber Dog turned to Hsi in surprise. "So your shadow can speak. And what a terror he is!"

"I'm glad you recognize that." The shadow laughed proudly. "I'm a real terror, I am!"

"Will you tell me why Wooden Man is so upset?" Hsi asked Rubber Dog.

"I'll have to tell you a story to explain that."

This is the story.

There was a little girl here — a toy of course — called Rag Doll. She was a dear, good creature. She always spoke very softly, for fear her breath might disturb the motes of dust in the air and frighten them. And she always walked with a light, light step, for fear of harming the tiniest insect on the ground — she was even afraid of hurting the pebbles and sand. As she was very hard-working and loved flowers, she was always watering the trees and plants here, although they never blossomed. She kept hoping to find one out in flower, never mind how small. She was ever so clean too, and kept washing her face and brushing her teeth. When she wasn't doing this, she was washing her hands. As she was delicate and her face was pale, all the toys were afraid she might fall ill.

"Do be careful!" they said when they met her. "Don't get too tired!"

But in a white house here lived two wicked men: Tin Soldier and White Porcelain Man. They were not like the other toys. They never did a stroke of work, but just bullied other people, Rag

Doll for instance. They pulled her into their house and wouldn't let her go, but made her sweep and wash and cook, and generally fetch and carry for them. They never let her rest. She could rest "next time," they always said, but as "next time" never came she could never rest. After a while she fell ill. Wooden Man was the first to hear of her illness. He didn't know what to do, and started crying as if his heart would break. When Rubber Dog heard the news, he didn't know what to do either. To start with he begged Wooden Man not to cry, but it was no use! The more he said the more Wooden Man cried.

When Rubber Dog reached this point, Wooden Man's pearly tears began to flow again. He rubbed his eyes furiously and said:

"Good girl, Rag Doll. Ill now — poor thing! . . ."

"She's too spoilt," sneered the shadow. "What does it matter if she's ill for once?"

"Does matter! It does!" Wooden Man sobbed aloud.

"Don't cry now," said Hsi. "Let's think of a way to save her."

Rubber Dog bounced up in excitement.

"To save her? Count me in!"

"Me too!" Wooden Man had stopped crying.

Baby Bear and Velvet Duck stopped playing and ran to join them.

"Where are you going?" they shouted. "We're coming too!"

"To save Rag Doll," said Rubber Dog.

"Not us! Not us!" The shadow answered for them. "We haven't played long enough."

"Rag Doll's ever so sweet," said Baby Bear. "We ought to save her. We don't mind not playing."

"That's right!" said Velvet Duck. "We've played enough."

"Go if you want," said the shadow. "I'm not going. And neither is Hsi."

"Who says I'm not?" demanded Hsi angrily.

"I do! If I won't let you, you can't go!" The shadow was angry too.

Hsi argued with him for ever so long. But no matter what he said, the shadow wouldn't agree.

Then Baby Bear produced a penknife, and handed it to Hsi.

"Here you are! Let him stay behind if he wants to. Cut him off, and each of you can do as he likes."

"Don't do that! Don't do that!" screeched the shadow. "Think how ugly you'll be without a shadow!"

"Honestly?" Hsi was taken aback. "Will I be ugly without a shadow?"

"Of course not!" said Baby Bear.

"If you're thinking of the look of the thing, the two of us can share my shadow," said Rubber Dog. "Mine's a very decent shadow. Never a peep out of it."

"Mine's a good shadow too," said Velvet Duck. "I'll lend it you if you like."

". . . Lend you . . . my shadow," sobbed Wooden Man. "Don't . . . need one."

"Don't cut me off!" The shadow was in a panic. "I'll go! I'll go!"

"He's too horrid," said Baby Bear. "You'd better get rid of him."

"I won't have it! I won't have it! Nobody's going to cut me off!" The shadow was shouting and crying at the same time.

When Wooden Man heard this, his heart started thudding again — pu-tung, pu-tung — and his nose turned red.

"Poor thing . . . crying. Don't cut . . . him off."

"But you're not to do any more shouting!" Hsi warned the shadow.

"All right."

"Nor jeer at people any more!" said Rubber Dog.



"All right."

The shadow became much quieter. For quite a long time he didn't utter a word.

So, headed by Rubber Dog, they set off to find the white house in which Tin Soldier lived.

## 12. Straight Snake

They hadn't gone far when they heard someone calling from the roadside:

"Hullo, friends! Where are you off to in such a hurry?"

A thin paper snake was lying in a clump of grass swallowing something. As Hsi had once owned a snake like this, he was not afraid of it.

"We're going to save Rag Doll," he said.

"Rag Doll's fallen ill of overwork," added Rubber Dog. "We want to rescue her from Tin Soldier's place. Why don't you come with us?"

"Dear me! Dear me!" The snake sighed. "Is Rag Doll ill? I *am* sorry. She's a good friend of mine. I'm quite devoted to my friends and just love helping them. I don't know how I could live without my friends — I doubt if I could swallow a single frog."

As he was speaking, he swallowed a frog whole. At once a bulge appeared in his throat, and started slithering slowly downwards.

"So you're going to save Rag Doll?" he went on. "That's good, that's fine! If I weren't in the middle of a meal, I'd certainly go with you. But as you can see, I'm busy eating a frog, so I can't go."

"Does that frog taste good?" asked Velvet Duck.

"I'm rather hungry myself," said Baby Bear. "My tummy's rumbling."

"Frogs aren't very good to eat," said the snake hastily. "So I won't offer you any. It can't be helped, you know. As a very wise big fish once said: Big fish eat little fish, and little fish eat shrimps. And as a very wise wolf once said: Wolves travel a thousand *li* for meat, and dogs travel a thousand *li* for rubbish. That's why a simple snake like myself can eat nothing but a little frog. Frogs don't taste nice at all, the meat is bitter, and as I've only the one I won't ask you to be my guests. I'm very fond of you though, because we're such good friends."

"That's right," said Hsi. "I know you. You're Paper Snake."

The snake nodded.

"What a good memory you have!" he said. "My name isn't Paper Snake though, but Straight Snake, because I'm such a straightforward fellow. There's no poison in me at all. I'm polite to everyone. I sympathize with everyone."

"Fine . . . fellow," whispered Wooden Man, very moved.

"So modest too," said Velvet Duck.

Just then a frog slipped out of the snake's tail. He promptly seized it and swallowed it again. Then he gave an embarrassed laugh.

"This can't be helped, you know. Big fish eat little fish, little fish eat shrimps, wolves eat meat, and dogs eat rubbish. A straightforward snake like myself just eats a little frog. As I've only got this one frog, and it's such a lean little thing, I can't offer you any. But I'm very fond of you all, and it hurts me not to be able to entertain you."

As he was speaking, the bulge in his throat started slithering downwards again. The frog must have found it very stuffy in there, for it kept wriggling about inside the snake.

"Come on!" said Rubber Dog. "Hurry up and find Tin Soldier!"

"When you see Tin Soldier, give him my regards," said the snake.

"He's a bad egg," said Baby Bear. "Why should you send him your regards?"

"A slip of the tongue, a slip of the tongue," said the snake hastily. "What I meant was: Give my regards to Rag Doll if you see her. But I'd advise you not to go. I've just remembered what a temper Tin Soldier has."

"That doesn't matter," said Hsi. "We'll make him see reason."

"I wouldn't be so sure." Straight Snake shook his head. "Once Tin Soldier loses his temper, he just won't listen to reason. He's a terror when he flies into a rage."

"There you are!" The shadow piped up again. "I told you not to go, but you insisted."

"You keep quiet!" said Hsi. "We're going, and that's that."

The frog had slipped out from the snake's tail once more. At once the snake seized and swallowed it again.

"Why do you go on and on eating that same frog?" asked Velvet Duck wonderingly.

The snake sighed in a most pathetic way.

"Why? Because this is the only one I have — what else can I eat? Don't worry about the frog. He doesn't mind. He's my friend too. He's really a splendid frog. You must have seen that he wasn't at all upset."

"What!" said Baby Bear. "You swallowed him so fast, how could we see whether he was upset or not?"

"Good for you!" said Straight Snake admiringly. "I can see you're a clever fellow. When it comes to swallowing, I *am* very fast. That's a

weakness of mine. You were absolutely right. You've got sharp eyes!"

When Baby Bear heard this, he stopped being annoyed.

Rubber Dog pressed them again to go on.

"Are you sure you must save Rag Doll?" asked Straight Snake. "Go along then. But don't blame me if Tin Soldier loses his temper. And remember to give my regards to Rag Doll if you see her. She's my good friend and a really charming girl — how I miss her! Goodbye! Goodbye! Please don't forget me, friends!"

### **13. The White House**

Rubber Dog led Hsi and the others away. Before long they reached the white house where Tin Soldier lived.

This was an expensive-looking, ugly house. The walls were a dazzling white, but inside all was dirt and disorder. There were gold velvet curtains to all the windows, but many of them were in tatters, sagging on the window ledge. Cobwebs hung from the ceilings like little flags. The lower half of the walls was covered with pencil drawings. There was a great deal of furniture in the house, all of it gold-inlaid, but it was stacked up anyhow.

Some tables were piled on beds, some chairs on tables. And strewn over the tables, chairs, beds and floors were pillows, quilts, bottles and tins. You couldn't move without treading on a pillow, bumping into a bottle, or knocking over a teacup or something of the sort.

The gate of the house was tightly closed, so they could not get in that way. All the windows were wide open though, and they looked inside. Tin Soldier, White Porcelain Man and Grey Rat, in long nightgowns and big bedroom slippers, were feasting at a round table, with no idea that they were being watched.

As Tin Soldier liked to keep saying "No," his nickname was No-no-no. He was tall and thin, with hunched shoulders as if he were afraid of the cold, and there was always a dewdrop at the end of his nose. He was holding an immensely long cigarette, like a new lead pencil, and he kept smoking while he was eating. The clouds of smoke he puffed out encircled the three of them. As Tin Soldier smoked, the other two kept sneezing: A-tchew! A-tchew!

Tin Soldier stood up and flourished a goblet of wine.

"I'm drinking to your sneezing, no, to your stopping sneezing!"

The three of them gulped down three big goblets of wine.



Tin Soldier sat down with his feet on the table, and went on:

“As I’m not fat enough, I’ve got to put on a little flesh. So I can’t not eat some more sponge-cakes.”

He grabbed a cake, stuffed it into his mouth, and swallowed it.

“I’m too fat,” said White Porcelain Man with a long yawn. “By too fat I mean too fleshy. So I must lose some flesh. The doctors tell me that to lose weight I must eat more. That’s why I must eat more cakes too.”

He grabbed a cake and stuffed it into his mouth.

Grey Rat snatched up another cake.

"I don't want to put on weight or lose it," he said, "but I want to eat plenty of cake. As you're eating, I'll eat too."

The three rascals roared with laughter.

"Not bad! Not bad!" said Tin Soldier. "We can't not eat a lot of cakes. With Rag Doll here we needn't stir a foot or lift a finger. When the food is finished, we'll tell her to fetch some more."

The three of them started bawling for more cakes.

Presently Rag Doll came in from the kitchen with a huge plate of cakes. The cakes were golden yellow, but her face was very white. The plate was so large and there were so many cakes on it that frail little Rag Doll could hardly carry it. She pinched her lips together as she walked slowly along, a step at a time. She was panting, and her face was growing whiter and whiter.

"She's tired out," whispered Hsi outside the window.

Wooden Man's heart started thumping loudly again — pu-tung, pu-tung!

"Careful!" Rubber Dog warned him. "Don't let your heart make such a noise. It would spoil everything if Tin Soldier and the others heard it."



Inside the house Tin Soldier, smoking and banging the table, was urging Rag Doll to hurry.

"Get a move on! Do you want us to starve to death? Good heavens! I'm fainting with hunger!"

"I'm ill from undernourishment!" boomed White Porcelain Man. "Hurry up, can't you!"

Rag Doll was very nervous. Just before she reached the table the smoke made her sneeze, and she dropped the plate.

Dong!

The three rascals leaped to their feet.

"Was that a clock?" asked Grey Rat, stopping his ears.

"It sounded awfully like a clock." White Porcelain Man was trembling. "It really did. . . ."

"No, no, no! It wasn't a clock!" shouted Tin Soldier angrily. "It wasn't a clock, though it sounded just as horrible."

Rag Doll was white as a sheet now. She didn't say a word, but just started crying softly.

Tin Soldier grabbed pillows and bottles, and hurled them like a madman at the ceiling. Cobwebs started falling one after the other. The room was filled with dust.

After throwing things for a while, he craned his neck to bawl at Rag Doll:

"Why did you sneeze? Why did you make such a noise smashing that plate? Don't you know

that I can't bear the sound of a clock? No, no, no! This wasn't a clock, but never mind. It sounded just like one — disgusting sound! I could burst with rage! I'll see you pay for this!"

"Lock her up in the kitchen," said White Porcelain Man. "Don't let her out again."

"No, no, no! We won't let her out!" thundered Tin Soldier. "We won't let her cry, we won't let her shed tears, and we won't . . . we won't . . . won't . . . won't."

Rag Doll was weeping more bitterly than ever.

Outside the window Hsi whispered to the others:

"Quick! Let's climb in quickly and rescue Rag Doll!"

Just then the shadow shouted to Tin Soldier:

"Look out! Look out! Hsi and the others are coming to rescue Rag Doll. Shut those windows, quick!"

"Shut the windows! Shut the windows!" yelled Grey Rat inside. "Hsi's come to rescue Rag Doll."

"They're here!" screamed the shadow. "They're here!"

"What! How dare they?" Tin Soldier drew a glittering sword. White Porcelain Man seized a bottle as his weapon. The three rascals rushed to the window.

"Run! Run!" cried Rubber Dog. "They're armed!"

Hsi and the others ran.

"After them! After them!" bleated the shadow. "They're running away!"

Hsi could not make the shadow keep quiet, but rushed along dragging him with him. They ran and ran, for how long no one knows, and finally panted to a stop. Luckily Tin Soldier and the others hadn't followed them.

#### **14. Hsi Takes His Leave of the Shadow**

Even though Tin Soldier hadn't followed them, our friends weren't at all pleased. Because now that Rag Doll was locked up in the kitchen she must be very unhappy, and her illness was bound to grow worse. What ever was to be done? They felt more and more upset.

"It's all the fault of Hsi's shadow," said Rubber Dog. "If he hadn't called out, we could have rushed in and rescued Rag Doll."

"That's right," the others agreed. "By calling out he stopped us from rescuing her, and we were nearly caught by Tin Soldier ourselves."

Baby Bear produced his penknife again and offered it to Hsi.

"Go on! Cut off that nasty shadow!" he said.

Hsi took the penknife from him.

"Hey! What are you doing?" cried the shadow.

"I'm leaving you," announced Hsi. "You're not my own shadow, only one I changed into. And you keep making trouble for us. I don't want to be stuck with you all the time. You won't do as I say, and I can't do as you say."

"From now on neither of us need order the other about." The shadow wasn't shouting now. "We can talk things over together."

"That won't do!" cried the others. "You can't talk things over with him!"

"Goodbye!" said Hsi to the shadow. "Good-bye!"

"I won't have it!" The shadow made a terrible fuss. "You can't get rid of me without my permission. Besides, once you've cut me off who'll be *my* shadow? If I can't find another shadow I shall be finished."

"What's that!" exclaimed Velvet Duck. "You've got it the wrong way round. If you can't find another *master*, you mean."

"Well, if you like. Whose shadow can I be in future?"

Wooden Man lowered his head in thought.

"Yes," he said. "If no one . . . wants him . . . how sad . . . he'll be!"

"Don't talk nonsense!" The shadow took offence again. "Why should no one want me? I'm such an intelligent shadow that everybody likes my company. I can make whoever's with me happy."

"Why don't I feel happy then?" asked Hsi.

"That's your fault for not doing as I said. . . ."

"Don't waste time talking to him," said Baby Bear to Hsi. "Hurry up and cut him off."

"Don't! Don't!" howled the shadow. "I haven't agreed to it. You mustn't do it! You're all bad lots! I shall tell Tin Soldier and get him to carry you off and lock you all up!"

Hsi squatted down, opened the penknife, and carefully cut the shadow off his heels. It simply tickled a little just like the first time, but Hsi didn't dare laugh. The shadow rolled on the ground, sobbing and screaming.

"Shove him into a hole somewhere," said Rubber Dog. "Otherwise he'll fasten on to someone else and make no end of trouble."

Luckily there was a ditch near by, and they all helped Hsi push the shadow into it. For the moment Hsi was a boy without a shadow.

He felt much lighter than before. In fact, to begin with he couldn't get used to it and kept thinking something was missing. Would he be able to get another shadow? And if he didn't, wouldn't he find

it rather awkward? Well, these problems didn't occur to him at the time, because he was too busy thinking how to rescue Rag Doll. How on earth was he to do it? Tin Soldier and his cronies were armed, and certainly wouldn't give her up willingly.

What was to be done? None of them had any idea. In the end it was Rubber Dog who thought of a way. He remembered that there was an old dough man here, very old and very wise. If they went to him, he might be able to tell them how to rescue Rag Doll. The others thought that was a good idea, and set out with Rubber Dog to find Old Dough Man.

## **15. Papier-Mâché Cock**

Old Dough Man lived in a rickety packing-case at the foot of an ordinary knoll. So they went to look for a rickety packing-case at the foot of an ordinary knoll. But while they were on the way, in other words before they reached the knoll and found the rickety case and Old Dough Man, they came across Papier-Mâché Cock. He was standing all by himself on top of a high chimney. Dressed in a black velvet coat with a border of red and green, he was strutting round and round the chim-

ney top. Hsi looked up and caught sight of something red and green moving up there.

"What's that bright thing on the chimney?" he asked.

Papier-Mâché Cock, who had very sharp ears, immediately introduced himself.

"I'm surprised you have to ask! Everyone knows Papier-Mâché Cock who stands higher than anyone else!"

"See how stuck-up he is!" whispered Velvet Duck.

"Stuck-up?" The cock had heard her. "What's stuck-up about me? Everyone calls me stuck-up. If they want a comparison, they say proud as a cock, as if all cocks were proud, but that's absolute nonsense. Just tell me, in what way am I proud? I don't think I'm proud at all. I really can't see it."

Actually, of course, Papier-Mâché Cock was *very* proud. He considered everything about himself the best in the world: his voice, his way of walking, his clothes and so on. He always threw his chest out when he walked, and looked down on other people. As if that weren't enough, he thought he should stand higher than everyone else to show how superior he was. So he found this chimney and perched on top of it. And there he stayed even when he was bored, not liking to come down. When he found it too dull, he minced round

the edge of the chimney as if he were taking a stroll. Sometimes he longed to have someone to talk to, but usually there was no one. So when he saw Hsi and the others he was ever so keen to keep them for a really good chat. He watched them out of the corner of his eye, and when they said nothing he asked:

"Why don't you say something? Where are you off to in such a hurry?"

"To find Old Dough Man," Hsi told him.

Papier-Mâché Cock crowed with laughter.

"What do you want with that dried-up, skinny old fellow? He can't even sing — he can only play the flute. I can't bear flutes."

"He's very clever, though," said Rubber Dog. "He'll be able to tell us how to rescue Rag Doll."

"Oh? What's the matter with Rag Doll? She's a brainless creature with no voice at all, and a coward into the bargain."

"Tin Soldier has locked her up in the kitchen," said Baby Bear. "Don't ask so many questions. Come on down and help us rescue her."

"What an idea!" Papier-Mâché Cock shook his head. "I've no time to go with you."

"Aren't you just standing on the chimney with nothing to do?" asked Velvet Duck.

"What do you know about it?" Papier-Mâché



Cock was angry. "Standing up here is work. I'm thinking. Thinking is work."

"What are you thinking about?" asked Wooden Man. "Will you tell us?"

"Certainly." Papier-Mâché Cock was pleased again. "I was having very, very important thoughts. In fact, I was wondering how heroes are made. Quite a problem that. For instance, what clothes must you wear and what songs must you sing to be a hero. . . ."

"Don't listen to him," cried Baby Bear impatiently. "We haven't got all day."

"Silly bear!" Papier-Mâché Cock was cross again. "You just don't understand."

"Ah . . . stuck-up . . . really . . ." said Wooden Man.

"You don't dare be stuck-up!" The cock pointed at Wooden Man. "You haven't got what it takes. You're just a damp hunk of firewood, and you'd smoke so much if you were burned that people's eyes would water. Your own eyes are always wet too. What's so wonderful about you?"

The others were furious.

"Wh-what's so w-w-wonderful about *you*?" stuttered Rubber Dog.

"Me?" Papier-Mâché Cock preened himself. "I'm a big cock. You're all standing down below, while I'm on top of the chimney. I'm extremely

busy. If I were to cough, everyone would say: 'Listen, Papier-Mâché Cock's coughing again. How can anyone who's so busy find time to cough? He really is wonderful! Wonderful!' That's me. You're just Rubber Dog, and all you can do is wag your tail underneath my chimney. All Velvet Duck can do is say 'What's that?' — she can't sing a single song. And Hsi is nothing but a lazy schoolboy. There's nothing wonderful about that — I can be lazy too. He can climb roofs, but not chimneys. I'm Papier-Mâché Cock, Papier-Mâché Cock!"

Papier-Mâché Cock was so carried away by his eloquence that he went on and on as if he would never stop.

"Let's go," said Hsi. "Pay no attention to him."

They all moved quickly on.

Papier-Mâché Cock crowed with laughter again, and shouted after them:

"Why are you going? You don't dare listen! You're afraid because you don't know how to answer! . . ."

## 16. Old Dough Man

They walked on and on past quite a few knolls till they couldn't hear the cock's howls of laughter

any more. Soon they heard a different sound, ti-liu, ti-liu-liu — the trills of a flute. In front of them was the ordinary knoll with a rickety packing-case under it, where Old Dough Man was lying playing his flute.

Old Dough Man was really old. He had a thick beard and very little hair. Though he was playing as hard as he could, he kept on making mistakes. And this annoyed him so much that he was frowning as if his shaggy eyebrows were one straight line.

Without stopping for breath, Velvet Duck burst out:

“We . . . we! . . .”

“Keep quiet!” bellowed Old Dough Man. “Can’t you see what I’m doing? You’ve made me go wrong.”

He put his flute to his lips and started again.

“Honestly,” said Baby Bear, “we’ve come to see you.”

“There, you’ve put me off again!” He was even more annoyed. “I told you to keep quiet, but you went and talked! You can see me now, can’t you? I’m here, but where has my music got to? Hurry up and tell me that!”

“I don’t know,” mumbled Baby Bear.

Old Dough Man picked up his flute with a

thoughtful frown, closed his eyes and started again. Ti-liu, ti-liu, ti-liu-liu. . . .

"Honestly, we came to see you," said Hsi after a bit. "Tin Soldier's locked Rag Doll up."

"What!" Old Dough Man jumped to his feet. "Rag Doll locked up! Why didn't you say so before? Tut, tut! Why can't you children say what you mean? Well, if Rag Doll's locked up, why don't you rescue her?"

"We've tried," said Rubber Dog. "But when Tin Soldier drew his sword we ran away. Can you tell us how to rescue her?"

Old Dough Man scratched his head.

"How to rescue Rag Doll? If Tin Soldier has a sword, I wouldn't dare go there either."

Wooden Man's lips trembled, and tears rolled down his cheeks.

"Why are you crying?" snapped Old Dough Man. "I've got a wonderful plan, but I won't tell it you. It's a sure way of rescuing her, though."

Velvet Duck jumped for joy.

"Lovely! Lovely! If you won't tell him, tell me!"

"Tell you? Oh, no. It's a secret. I can't tell anyone."

"Just give us a hint," begged Hsi. "Just one little hint."

"No, not even a hint." The old man shook his head. "You know, when Tin Soldier and the others have had a good feed they go to sleep. Once they're asleep, if anyone goes to the back of the white house and calls under the kitchen window: 'Come on out, Rag Doll!' she'll open the window and come out. I can't give away a secret like that, can I?"

"What else?" asked Hsi.

"What do you mean — 'what else'? That's an even bigger secret. Not far from the white house is a tower which Tin Soldier uses as his storehouse. It's full of nice things to eat. Anybody who goes there can have a good feed and take a little nap. When Tin Soldier and his cronies sleep, they snore. You can hear their snores from that tower, and if you come down while they're snoring they won't wake up. Then you can run to the window at the back of the white house and call: 'Rag Doll! Rag Doll! Open the window and come out!' Then you'll have rescued her, won't you? I can hardly tell you a secret like that, can I?"

"It's a funny thing," said Rubber Dog. "I seem to understand it all without your telling me. All right, there's no need to go on. But. . . ."

Old Dough Man glared at him.

"What do you mean by 'But . . .' ? Do you want me to take you to find the storehouse myself? Impossible!"

"We'd never find it ourselves," said Velvet Duck.

"So Velvet Duck wants me to take you. No, it's out of the question! If I were to go with you I'd have to leave my rickety packing-case, and I can't do that. It's my bedroom, my bed, my stool and my chest of drawers. My lovely, rickety packing-case — how can I leave it?"

Wooden Man shed two more tears.

"Why do you keep crying?" Old Dough Man looked at him sternly.

"Not crying." Wooden Man wiped his eyes quickly.

"He did cry!" said Rubber Dog. "Those are real tears."

Old Dough Man frowned.

"He didn't. Wooden Man didn't cry. Come on then. Come with me! Goodbye, packing-case. I'm only taking them this once, never again. Goodbye!"

So Old Dough Man took them to find Tin Soldier's storehouse. They went up hill and down dale, up hill and down dale. And the old fellow walked so fast that the rest of them had to run to keep up with him.

Velvet Duck was staring at Old Dough Man as she panted along.

"Why have you got such a big beard?" she asked.

"Don't you even know that?" said Baby Bear.  
"All his hair's gone to his beard."

"That's right. That's why I'm called Old Dough Man."

"If your beard turned back into hair, you wouldn't be old any more, I suppose," said Hsi.

"No. Then I'd have to be called Young Dough Man."

After crossing a few more hills they came to Tin Soldier's storehouse. It was a delightful little two-storeyed building, a kind of tower.

### **17. The Tower with No Door or Staircase**

This little tower looked as if it were made of big toy building-bricks, brightly painted in different colours. The roof was pointed, and there were small round and oblong pillars at the windows. The funny thing was that this handsome building had no doors or staircase, only upstairs windows. How did you get in, Hsi wondered?

"Climb up!" said Old Dough Man.

A thick rope dangled from one of the windows to the ground. Old Dough Man took hold of this and swarmed up without even using his legs. Halfway up he started swinging from side to side and making faces at them.

"This is fun!" he called down. "Come on up!"

Hsi could climb ropes too. He went straight up just as Old Dough Man had done, and of course Baby Bear, Rubber Dog and the rest followed suit. In no time at all they were inside the tower.

Hanging in the tower was a big, round copper bell. In fact the rope was fastened to this bell. But although the bell had never stopped swinging while they were climbing, not a sound had it made. What could be the reason for that?

Before they could ask, Old Dough Man pointed at the bell.

"That's another secret," he told them. "I'm sure you clever children would like to know why the bell didn't make any noise."

"I know, I know!" said Velvet Duck. "It's dumb."

Old Dough Man shook his head.

"It's ill," said Baby Bear.

Still the old man shook his head.

"Is it broken?" asked Rubber Dog.

"That's more like it," said Old Dough Man. "Somebody's broken it on purpose. Who do you suppose it was?"

"Not me!" said Hsi promptly. "All I broke was an alarm clock."

"Not you?" said Old Dough Man. "I never said it was. You broke the alarm clock. This was



broken by Tin Soldier and White Porcelain Man. Do you know why?"

"I know!" squeaked Velvet Duck. "It's because they're afraid of bells, right?"

"I know too!" shouted Baby Bear. "Bells scare them. They're afraid of classes and have headaches as soon as the bell goes, right?"

"That's it!" Old Dough Man nodded. "Tin Soldier and that lot are such lazy devils that the sound of a bell terrifies them. When they hear a bell ring, they feel as if someone were spanking them. That's why they broke this one. As if that weren't enough, they moved it on the sly to this storehouse and hid it here, so that nobody could repair it. And as if that weren't enough, they made no door in this tower, because if there were a door people might come in. They made no stairway either, because if there were a stairway people might come up. How would they get in themselves? They hit on this idea of tying a thick rope to the bell and climbing through the window. . . ."

"Silly fools!" Rubber Dog laughed. "If they can use the rope, so can we. If I were them, I'd get rid of the rope too, and then no one could come in."

"That's it," agreed Baby Bear. "A good idea!"

"How would you get in yourself then?" asked Hsi.

When Rubber Dog was stumped for an answer, the others laughed.

"If you laugh, I shan't tell you!" he muttered crossly.

Then Wooden Man asked Old Dough Man:

"Can the bell be repaired?"

"Of course." Old Dough Man frowned.

"That's a secret too, but one that Hsi knows."

"I don't!" Hsi was very surprised.

"Oh, yes, you do."

"Honestly, I don't!" Hsi felt very put out.

"Not now, but later you will. All right, let's have something to eat."

"Goody, goody!" Baby Bear clapped his paws. "I'm ever so hungry!"

"My tummy's been rumbling for hours." Rubber Dog licked his lips. "But what about Rag Doll?"

"What Rag Doll?" asked Old Dough Man.

"Dear me, I'd forgotten her! You want to rescue her, don't you? Well, have something to eat first. If you don't, I'll be cross."

"Don't be cross," said Velvet Duck. "We'll eat."

This was a well-stocked storehouse Tin Soldier had, piled with good things to eat. Tinned food, biscuits, boxes of cakes, packets of sweets, bottles of orangeade — too many to count. They ate as

much as they wanted. Soon Baby Bear felt he was ready to burst.

"Do you want to rescue Rag Doll?" asked Old Dough Man.

"Did you forget again?" asked Velvet Duck.

"Almost. If you want to save her, you must do as I say."

"We will," said Baby Bear, holding his stomach.

"All right then, first we'll rest. One, two, three, lie down!"

As they didn't want him to be cross, they all lay down. But presently Old Dough Man sat up again.

"Will you do as I say?" he asked. "All sit up now and listen to a story. If anyone doesn't listen, I shall be cross."

They all sat up immediately — not that they were afraid of his losing his temper this time.

## **18. The Story Bag's Story**

"A story!" cried Velvet Duck. "Lovely! What are you going to tell us?"

"Who says I'm going to tell you anything? I'm too tired to tell stories!" Old Dough Man fished a small green bag out of his pocket. "This is a story

bag. It will tell you a story, not me. It's a wonderfully clever bag. You just choose a subject — any subject you like — and it will tell you a story."

But what to choose? They looked at each other, and no one had any ideas. In the end it was Hsi who thought of a subject.

His eye fell on the flute in Old Dough Man's hand.

"A story about a flute," he said. "How about that?"

Before Old Dough Man could say anything, the little green bag started speaking.

"All right. Of course." It spoke very distinctly.

"It's all right." Old Dough Man stroked his beard proudly. "It's chock-full of stories. Stories about flutes, stories about trumpets, stories about fiddles — any story you care to ask for. Just let it think for a minute, and it'll tell you a story about a flute."

"I don't need to think, I'm ready!" said the story bag, sounding quite sure of itself. "Listen, everyone! The story's going to start. Imagine I'm a flute. Good, now I'm a flute, a flute that can sing pretty songs. . . ."

Here is the story.

I'm a flute, a flute painted black and glossy

all over. But a long, long time ago, before I turned into a flute, I was just an ordinary, everyday bamboo stick. I and my brother — he was a bamboo too — grew up in a beautiful valley. For a long time we did nothing. But the sun gave us warm sunlight, the black clouds gave us rain when we were thirsty, and the earth gave us all sorts of rich nourishment. As they provided us with all these things, we hadn't a care in the world. We had food, drink and fun every day, and we grew higher and higher, stronger and stronger.

One day my brother felt ashamed.

"We're quite big now, but others are helping us and giving us things all the time," he said. "We haven't helped others or done anything for them. I do feel bad about it! I hope we'll be able to do something useful some day and help others for a change."

When he put it that way, I felt ashamed myself.

"Yes," I said. "I hope a day will come when we can help others and make them happy."

We discussed the best way to do this. But as we didn't see eye to eye, we started squabbling.

I said: "The best help is long-term, constant help. I want to become very clever and last for ever, so that I can make people happy all the time."

"The best help," retorted my brother, "is help in time of need, no matter what it costs you. Never mind if it doesn't last for ever. Don't let's worry about that. Our first job should be to consider what people need and how to make ourselves most useful."

"How can you know," I objected, "if you don't spend some time finding out their different needs? That's why I think the length of time is so important. What's wrong with helping people for ever, if you can?"

"I think you're too fussy," said my brother. "I don't agree."

Neither of us approved of the other's idea. We argued for hours and hours without convincing each other.

"Don't let's quarrel," said my brother at last. "Let's each do as he pleases. How about it?"

"Good!" I agreed. "Then we can see which of us gives the best help."

A chance to help others came later. It was a dark night, with no moon or stars, pitch black. We suddenly heard sighs and groans. A group of travellers had lost their way and strayed into our valley. We kept hearing them stumble and knock into things. Then someone called:

"Bamboos! Bamboos! Which of you will help us? Which of you will help us?"

"Do you want my help for ever or just this once?" I asked.

"Just this once."

"Nothing doing," I told him.

"Do you need help very badly?" asked my brother.

"That's it," said the voice. "We do."

"All right. I'll go." My brother didn't hesitate.

They cut him down for a torch.

The torch made a circle of light in the dark valley. Carrying the torch, the travellers found their path and were able to go slowly on.

The dark night passed. The travellers reached their journey's end, and the torch burned out. That was the help my brother gave, help given only once but help that was desperately needed, just as he had wished.

Later my turn came.

That was long after my brother turned into ashes, when someone sawed me carefully off the tree. Very skilfully they made round holes in me, so that I could play all manner of beautiful tunes. I was painted a glossy black too. I was a flute.

I lived on and on, singing on and on.

I have been through so much that I have many memories, memories happy and sad, of success as well as of failure. Each of my holes stands for a

different experience and the memory of some different emotion.

Whenever I start to sing, these emotions well up beyond my control and pour out one after the other. First I am happy, then sad. I laugh and cry by turns.

But even at my happiest, you can hear a note of sadness in my voice. That is because I can never forget my brother.

I must admit that he was right. The best help is that you give others in their hour of desperate need. To help others sincerely, you mustn't think of yourself. I sing all the time in memory of my brother. I sing whenever I am needed. When people are tired or depressed I try to encourage them, to make them love life and look ahead. When they are wildly happy or over-excited, I remind them of the past.

I never stop singing, but I have stopped worrying about how long I shall last. As I see it, no matter how well I sing I can't compare with my brother. All my songs together are not worth that circle of brightness the torch shed on that dark night.

The story bag suddenly stopped. That was the end of its story about a flute.

After a short pause it said:

"I would like to hear a flute."



“Yes!” Wooden Man dabbed at his eyes. “Old Dough Man, won’t you play to us?”

Old Dough Man had cocked his head as if he were listening.

“What’s that?” he asked. “Play the flute? . . . Wait a bit! Listen, all of you! Now is the time to go and rescue Rag Doll!”

### **19. Tin Soldier and His Cronies Sleep**

Tin Soldier and his cronies were snoring. They had most peculiar snores, like the chugging of engines just come into the station, which hiss “Shah! . . . Shah! . . . Shah! . . .” and then whistle “Toot! . . . Toot! . . . Toot! . . .”

“They’re asleep,” said Old Dough Man. “Off with you, quick!”

“Come on!” Rubber Dog bounced up. “Hurry up! Hurry up!”

Baby Bear and Velvet Duck were well brought up.

“Goodbye! Goodbye!” they called to Old Dough Man.

“Don’t shout!” he said. “If you wake Tin Soldier with your noise, I won’t be responsible.”

“We won’t make a noise. All right?” whispered Velvet Duck.

"Good!" said Old Dough Man. "That's more like it. Go ahead. I'm going to play the flute for the story bag. It's tired after telling that story. The two of us will have a little rest."

Rubber Dog was the first to climb out of the window and slide down the rope. He was followed by Hsi, Wooden Man, Baby Bear and Velvet Duck.

The white house was just in front. They started running.

Rubber Dog was so fast that he ran ahead. Velvet Duck, who was the slowest, fell behind.

"Wait for me! Wait for me!" she called anxiously.

Baby Bear turned back to scold her.

"What are you shouting for? Didn't Old Dough Man tell you not to make a noise?"

"Your own voice is pretty loud, Baby Bear," said Rubber Dog.

"Sshh!" said Hsi. "You're all making too much noise. The only good fellow is Wooden Man who hasn't made a sound. Isn't that right?"

"Yes . . . I keep . . . quiet," said Wooden Man.

So now Wooden Man was talking too. Not only that, his heart started thumping more loudly than anyone's voice — pu-tung, pu-tung, pu-tung! It's easy to understand why. He was wondering how to help Rag Doll open that window and escape when they got to the kitchen.

Presently Hsi's heart started thumping too. Quite natural. He was thinking:

"Suppose Tin Soldier wakes up? Suppose he draws his sword? Suppose. . . . This time I won't run away. I'm not afraid. I'll argue with him and give him a piece of my mind."

But as luck would have it, the three scallywags didn't wake. Their snores grew louder and louder, like rumbles of thunder.

Now Hsi and his friends were under the kitchen window. Rubber Dog wanted to be the first to climb up.

"I'm a good jumper," he said. "Watch me!"

He took a few steps back, crouched down like a professional sprinter, and bounded forward.

Crash! Bang! He hurtled down, the tip of his nose knocked crooked.

"Ai-yo! Ai-yo!" he groaned.

"Quiet!" said Hsi. "You can make all the noise you want once we've got Rag Doll out."

"All right." Rubber Dog kept quiet.

Velvet Duck was the next to try to get up. But her legs were so short that though she puffed and panted she couldn't reach the sill. Wooden Man and Baby Bear tried too, but in vain.

"Let me have a go," said Hsi. "Give me a leg up."

They lifted him up, and he crawled on to the ledge.

"Can you see her?" asked Velvet Duck. "Is she inside?"

"I can't see. Must you make so much noise?" said Hsi crossly.

Soon Baby Bear couldn't keep quiet any longer.

"What shall we play with Rag Doll when we get her out?" he whispered.

"No play," said Wooden Man. "We'll . . . run."

"Right!" burst out Rubber Dog. "We'll take a boat home."

"Do be quiet!" urged Hsi frantically. "You're making so much noise I can't see clearly."

He strained his eyes and this time he saw distinctly. Thin little Rag Doll was sitting alone in a dark corner of the kitchen. It was her all right! She was there!

"I can see her!" he called excitedly to the others.

This time it was their turn to scold him.

"Quiet!" said Velvet Duck.

"Quiet!" said Rubber Dog, Wooden Man and Baby Bear.

Then they all asked together:

"Hurry up and tell us what she's doing!"

## 20. Rag Doll Talks to Herself

Rag Doll was sitting there alone, talking softly to herself.

"Tears, tears!" she said. "Why must you keep flowing out? Do you want to escape? Do you want to water the flowers? Are you afraid the plants will dry up and wither? I'd like to go out too. I'd draw plenty of water. Don't you worry, I'd give the flowers all they need."

After a little while she went on:

"Tears, tears! Why do you keep flowing out? Do you think I'm dirty? Do you want to wash my face? Are you annoyed because I haven't washed for so long? I feel grubby too. As soon as I get out I'm going to draw water, lots and lots of water. Don't worry, I'll wash my face till it shines."

Hsi whistled outside the window, and called softly:

"Rag Doll!"

Rag Doll didn't hear him, but went on talking to herself.

"Tears, tears! Why do you keep flowing out? Why are you hot? Is it because you come from my heart? Why are you salty? Is it because your mother is the sea? Why do you keep trying to escape? Do you miss your mother? Your mother's a long way away, and so is mine. . . ."

Hsi had to rap on the window and call loudly:  
"Rag Doll! Come out! Can you hear me?"

This time Rag Doll heard. She hastily wiped her eyes and ran to the window.

"Who are you?" she asked.

"I'm Hsi. Come on out."

"How? The window's closed."

"That's easy. Unbolt it, open the window, and get out."

Rag Doll unbolted the window and opened it. Then she thought for a little and asked:

"Shall I get out now?"

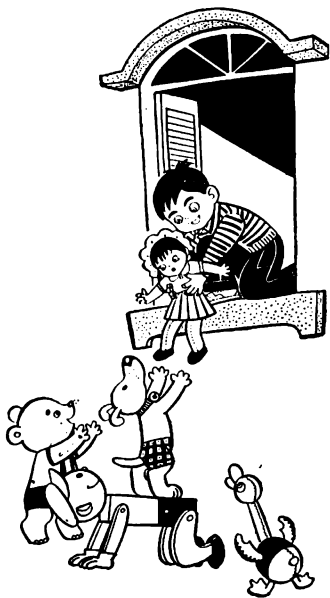
"Yes. Hurry up!"

"What will Tin Soldier and the others do if they find out?"

"Hurry up! Do hurry! They won't find out. They're asleep."

So Rag Doll climbed out of the window, and they helped her to the ground.

"How lovely it is outside!" she said happily. At once her cheeks became rosy.



"Have the flowers bloomed yet?" she asked.

Wooden Man hesitated a second, and then said:

"Not . . . yet."

When she heard that, her new colour faded a little.

"Have you seen my mother?" she asked.

"There aren't any mothers here," said Baby Bear.

Rag Doll's face became completely white again.

"I want my mother!" she said. "I want to find my mother!"

"Where is your mother?" asked Velvet Duck.

"At home. At home." Rag Doll started crying again.

Just then Straight Snake popped up stealthily behind them. Goodness knows where he had come from. He hadn't changed in the least. As soon as he saw them he greeted them politely.

"How are you, friends? What are you doing under Tin Soldier's window?"

"Nothing," said Baby Bear.

Straight Snake caught sight of Rag Doll.

"How are you, Rag Doll?" he asked. "How do you do? Why are you crying? Aha, you needn't tell me, I know. You've let Rag Doll out. Rag Doll, I'm your very best friend. I've been wanting

to rescue you for ages — long before they thought of it. Will you tell me how you got out?"

"I opened the window and climbed out," she answered softly.

"What!" screamed Straight Snake. "That's terrible! Have you told Tin Soldier?"

Rag Doll shook her head.

"Ai!" Straight Snake gave a long sigh. "That's awful! Why didn't you tell Tin Soldier? He's sure to be very annoyed. It's not polite not to tell him. And it's very naughty to climb out of windows. Tin Soldier is going to be furious. And when he's furious there's no dealing with him."

"I'm not afraid of him!" said Velvet Duck. "Don't tell him! The horrid thing!"

"Never mind Straight Snake," said Rubber Dog. "Hurry up and get going!"

So they left the white house.

"Are you going?" Straight Snake tried to bar their way. "That won't do! That's too bad! Don't go! Don't go! Where are you going? Won't you tell me?"

"No!" Baby Bear turned back to shout.

"So you won't tell even me?" hissed Straight Snake behind them. "What bad manners! All right, all right. I won't lose my temper, I'm polite. If you must go, go! Goodbye, goodbye!"



## 21. They Run to the Seashore

Hsi and his friends went faster and faster till very soon they were running. Something seemed to be urging them to hurry. Without so much as a look behind they ran on till they reached the shore. The sea was so still that it looked asleep, without any wind or waves. The water had frozen like thick, blue-black glass and lay there motionless.

Rubber Dog bounded wildly up and down the beach.

“Hurry up and go aboard!” he shouted.

They dashed to the wharf. There were ever so many boats there. But the boats were just as they had been — a lot of the steamers had no smoke in their funnels, while a few wisps of smoke from some others hung still in the air. Most of the yachts were carrying no sail, or had their sails half furled.

They ran up to a small steam launch. On a paper stuck to its funnel they read: “Not Sailing Yet.” They ran up to a big steamer. A wooden placard on one cabin door announced: “Will Not Sail Till Later.” There was nothing for it but to rush to a black cargo boat, but chalked in big letters on its hold they read: “No Sailing Today.” They ran desperately on to a neat little pleasure boat. On red silk hanging from its railing was embroidered in letters of gold: “So Sorry! Will Sail Next Time

for Certain!" They rushed to and fro without finding one craft that was ready to leave. All carried notices: "No Sailing Today" or "Sailing Next Time," while some just said: "No Sailing." It was too bad. What on earth could they do?

At last they found a wooden boat with no notice on it. Though it had no funnel, no mast and no crew, at least it didn't say: "Sailing Next Time." Delighted with their find, they jumped aboard.

Rag Doll was ever so pleased to see the sea.

"How lovely!" she said, dipping her hands in it. "Now I can wash my face."

She leaned down and scooped up some water to wash her face. After that she washed her handkerchief, and after that her hair. She went on and on.

"Time to sail!" shouted Rubber Dog.

But how did the boat go? It had no engine or sails — were there any oars? No, there was nothing. Not a single oar.

"Let's find some wood for oars," said Wooden Man.

But where could they find wood? There was none on the boat.

"Wait while I look on the beach," said Baby Bear.

"If you go ashore, please find me a comb," said Rag Doll. "I must comb my hair properly. . . ."

Before she had finished they heard a frightful

bellow in the distance:

"Catch 'em! Catch 'em! Don't let them get away!"

The sound became louder and louder, nearer and nearer. Tin Soldier, White Porcelain Man and Grey Rat were after them!

Rag Doll began to shiver. "I seem to feel cold! What ever shall we do?"

Wooden Man started shivering too in sympathy.

"Never mind!" he said comfortingly. "Don't be . . . afraid . . . I'm not . . . afraid."

"Jump into the water!" said Velvet Duck. "They can't swim."

"It's very cold," said Rag Doll. "And what shall I do if I get my dress wet? Besides, I can't swim either."

"I'll teach you," said Velvet Duck.

"There's no time for that," said Hsi. "Let's go ashore and run for it."

"A good idea," said Rubber Dog. "Hurry up and land! Hurry! . . ."

One by one they jumped ashore again. As Rubber Dog was the fastest, he led the way. As soon as he found they were not keeping up he stopped to shout:

"This way! This way! Hurry! Hurry!"

But Velvet Duck just couldn't run fast, and

Rag Doll was so weak that she wasn't much better. The others ran for a bit, and then had to stop to wait for them.

"Hurry!" Rubber Dog was frantic. "*Hurry up!*"

Tin Soldier and the rest heard him, and chased in their direction. The three dreadful creatures were brandishing long swords. They ran so fast they caught up with and surrounded Hsi's friends in no time.

"Hands up!" yelled Tin Soldier, waving his sword.

"Shan't!" growled Baby Bear.

Tin Soldier at once grabbed Baby Bear, and ordered White Porcelain Man and Grey Rat:

"Catch the lot of them, and shut them up in the cellar!"

So the three hoodlums caught Hsi and his friends and threw them into the cellar of the white house.

## **22. Papier-Mâché Cock Is Caught Too**

Ka-cha! The key grated in the lock, as the three ruffians shut our friends up in the cellar. "Hu — lu, hu — lu — lu!" They started triumphantly on their ugly song.

The cellar was horridly stuffy; clammy and dark as well. Rag Doll sat wretchedly on the cold,

cold ground and didn't say a word. Afraid she would fall ill if she went on moping like this, the others tried to comfort her.

"Just sing a song, and you'll feel quite cheerful," said Rubber Dog.

Rag Doll shook her head.

"If you . . . won't sing . . . shall I . . . ?" asked Wooden Man.

Still Rag Doll shook her head.

"Tell you what," said Velvet Duck. "If you comb your hair and plait it, and put on two red bows, you'll feel ever so much better."

"I haven't any red ribbon," said Rag Doll.

Baby Bear immediately produced his penknife.

"Never mind about red ribbon," he said. "I'll give you my penknife. Look!"

"I don't want it, thank you." Rag Doll shook her head. "I might cut my finger."

"I know!" cried Velvet Duck after thinking hard. "I'll give you a big red apple."

"What!" said Baby Bear. "You haven't any apples."

"What! What!" protested Velvet Duck. "If I haven't any now, I shall have some later. Then I'll give Rag Doll a lovely apple, a big, sweet, juicy one."

"Look here," said Hsi to Rag Doll. "I can carve a flower with that knife."

Rag Doll shook her head again.

"No, thank you. I don't like carved flowers. I want a real flower."

Though Hsi thought hard, all he could do was say:

"All right. Later on I'll give you a real flower."

"That's right," said Velvet Duck. "Later on we'll give her all the nice things we've got, how about it?"

They all cried:

"Good!"

Still Rag Doll wasn't happy, and she was growing whiter every minute. They didn't know what to do. If someone could have told her a story that would have been good, because Rag Doll loved stories. But Old Dough Man and his story bag weren't here. What could be done? If Rag Doll went on like this she would fall ill, and then how bad they'd feel!

Just then — ka-cha! — the key grated in the lock again, and the cellar door was opened. Tin Soldier had caught Papier-Mâché Cock too.

Papier-Mâché Cock protested loudly outside:

"It's the truth! I'm not one of Hsi's gang. What's so wonderful about Hsi? What's so wonderful about Rag Doll? I wouldn't be on their side for anything."

Swinging Papier-Mâché Cock by his neck, White Porcelain Man threw him inside.

"Liar!" he shouted. "You make me sick! You think I don't know that long neck of yours is made for lying! I know everything, and I don't need any proof that you're one of Hsi's gang. You talked to them, and told them you were a hero. You wouldn't have said that if you didn't mean to rescue Rag Doll. You must think me an ignorant fool. Pah! We know everything—we always have!"

They beat Papier-Mâché Cock and knocked him over. Ka-cha! The key turned in the lock again.

Presently the cock got slowly to his feet, and looked round out of the corner of his eye.

"What's this place?" he muttered. "It's no good. Nothing like the chimney top. I don't want to stay here, and I won't."

"Go then!" Baby Bear laughed.

Papier-Mâché Cock glared at him.

"Mind your own business!" he squawked. "I'll go when it suits me. At present I don't care to go, so I won't. And if you order me to go, I'll insist on staying. I won't go, so there!"

Then, ignoring them all, he strutted up and down the cellar with his head in the air.

### 23. They Talk Over the Past

They didn't know how long they had been in the cellar, but it seemed a long, long time. They couldn't play — it really was awfully dull. Then Hsi thought of a game. It was sure to be fun, he said, if each of them described something in his past. They all agreed that this would be amusing and that they should take it in turn. The only one who stayed out was Papier-Mâché Cock, who pretended that he wasn't interested. As a matter of fact, though, he was straining his ears as he walked up and down, listening carefully to each word they said.

Baby Bear was the first to speak. But his memory wasn't too good. After thinking hard he said he had liked circuses, and somehow or other had joined a circus himself. What he disliked most was lessons. Oh, now he remembered, it was because he didn't like lessons that he had run away to the circus. He didn't realize that there they had lessons too. Not school lessons, but circus lessons. And learning how to perform in a circus wasn't such fun as watching, so later he ran away, and somehow or other he had ended up here.

The next to speak was Velvet Duck, whose memory was even worse. All she remembered was having lots and lots of good friends.



"My good friends — oh my! — they were so good to me! I can't tell you how good they were. What were their names? Oh, I've forgotten their names, but they were ever so good!"

"Can't you remember a single one?" Rubber Dog was growing impatient.

"I've thought of one," said Velvet Duck presently. "Her name was Mother. She was my mother. Oh, she was a sweet girl! . . ."

"Mothers aren't girls," put in Hsi. "You can't call her a girl."

"Why not?" Velvet Duck did not agree with him. "She was so good! She was better than any good girl, she was a good mother. Every evening when she came home she always brought me something good to eat. She never once forgot."

Papier-Mâché Cock stood still.

"What did your mother give you to eat?" he asked.

"Ever so many things! . . ."

"Don't say!" said Baby Bear. "Don't tell him!"

"Don't tell me!" The cock pretended not to care. "I don't want to know."

He started strutting about on his own again.

Then Rubber Dog described some of his friends. Funnily enough, thinking back, the friend he remembered best was a bad-tempered cat. He

didn't like that cat to begin with, because it was so lazy and did nothing but lie by the stove all day till its fur was singed. Worst of all, over nothing at all it would arch its back and spit at him, which was hardly clean or polite. But thinking back, that cat just liked a tiff — in its heart it didn't dislike Rubber Dog. There were times, in fact, when it liked him. For instance, it often tiptoed up behind him and softly pulled his tail. When he turned round and growled he saw it was all a joke — just a bit of fun between the two of them. So the more he thought of it, the less he disliked that cat. He actually missed the creature now.

After Rubber Dog it was Wooden Man's turn. He blushed and stuttered:

"I . . . I've . . . nothing . . . to say."

"Wooden Man's a good sort," said Rubber Dog. "But he's no public speaker. Listen to the way his heart is thumping again. He's got lots of friends, haven't you, old man?"

Wooden Man nodded.

Now it was Rag Doll's turn. But she was still so unhappy that when they asked her to speak she said not a word, just plucked wretchedly at her skirt.

"Say something!" begged Hsi. "What are you thinking of now?"

“Nothing. . . . Now I’ve thought of something — can I go home?”

Papier-Mâché Cock crowed with laughter.

“She wants to go! That’s rich, that really is! She doesn’t even know that the door is locked, silly little fool!”

“Why do you keep laughing at people?” growled Baby Bear.

“I’m laughing because she can’t get out. The door’s locked. Even I can’t get out, much less her. Understand?”

“You may not be able to get out. But she can!”

Rag Doll started crying.

“Don’t cry!” they begged her. “Don’t listen to that cock. Someone is bound to let you out.”

Papier-Mâché Cock seemed sorry to see her crying.

“If we can’t go out, we can’t,” he said. “Why cry? Would you like me to sing to you? I’ve a beautiful voice, much better than Tin Soldier’s.”

“Don’t!” said Velvet Duck. “You’ve a horrid voice. Your singing can’t be good.”

“Who says I’ve a horrid voice?” The cock was indignant. “Have you ever heard me sing?”

“No, and I don’t want to.”

Papier-Mâché Cock coughed several times and cleared his throat.

"How do you know my voice isn't good then?" he asked. "What nonsense you talk! If you don't want to hear, I'll make you hear. If you'd begged me, I wouldn't have sung, but now I'm going to sing! Listen! You too, Rag Doll! I bet this will stop you crying. Listen, all of you! . . ."

Papier-Mâché Cock craned his neck and was just going to start when — ka-cha! — the door opened again. Thinking Tin Soldier and the others were back, the cock drew in his neck in fright and kept quiet.

"Well, well, well! Hurry up! Hurry up and go! Are you going to stay here all day?"

It was Old Dough Man to their rescue! Without stopping for explanations, they tumbled out behind him and took to their heels.

"Wait a bit!" screamed the cock behind them. "Where are you going? Wait for me!"

"How can you come with us?" asked Hsi. "Aren't you terribly busy?"

"Never mind, never mind!" cried the cock as he flapped along. "I must get away from here. I hate Tin Soldier and those other bullies. And you haven't heard me sing yet. I must sing properly for you once so that Velvet Duck stops saying I have a horrid voice. And you'll find me very useful in all sorts of ways."

"Come along then," said Hsi.

So Papier-Mâché Cock joined Hsi's little band. They hadn't gone far when they met Straight Snake, who greeted them most politely again.

"Hullo, friends! Where are you going? Why didn't you stay in Tin Soldier's cellar?"

They were so disgusted with him that they went straight on without paying him any attention.

## **24. The Secret of All Secrets**

Where could they go? None of them had any idea. Well, the best thing seemed to go back first to hide in Tin Soldier's storehouse while they thought of a plan. Very soon they reached the pretty little tower. Of course it still had no doors and no stairway, and they had to climb up the rope one by one. And of course the bell kept swinging without any sound.

How could they leave Next-Time Port? None of them had any idea. They were all most upset, all but Papier-Mâché Cock who was in high spirits. He rummaged right and left till he found a carton of biscuits which he ate greedily. Then he started scolding the others for not cleaning up the tower. But nobody answered back. They were too depressed to talk.

After a long, long time, Rag Doll said in a small voice to herself:

"I want to find my mother."

"To find your mother?" The cock caught her up at once. "That's easy. Just take a boat."

"But there are notices on all the boats saying they're not sailing," said Rubber Dog.

"How silly you are!" the cock said cockily. "Who says they're not sailing? All those notices say they'll sail next time. That means they *will* be sailing."

"Honestly?" Baby Bear cheered up again. "But when is 'next time'?"

"When? Don't ask me that! Not 'this time,' obviously. Later on, understand?"

This confused them all again, so that no one said anything for a time. Then Velvet Duck asked Old Dough Man:

"Can you think of a way to get us out of here?"

"No!" answered Papier-Mâché Cock for him.

"I wasn't asking *you*," said Velvet Duck.

"There is a way," said Old Dough Man. "But that's another secret. It's the secret of secrets."

"The secret of secrets!" Hsi cheered up. "Fine! Won't you give us a hint like last time?"

"All right," put in Papier-Mâché Cock again.

"It's all right with me. But I don't know the secret." Old Dough Man frowned at the cock. "You tell them."

"I don't know it either," blurted out the cock.

“Papier-Mâché Cock’s telling the truth,” said Old Dough Man with a smile. “The story bag knows it though, because this is a story. I’ll have to ask the story bag to tell you.”

“A story — goody!” cried Rag Doll, and her cheeks turned pink again.

Old Dough Man produced the small green bag once more.

“Story Bag, do you mind telling another story?” he said. “The title is *The Secret of Secrets*, and it tells them how to get away from here. Just tell them a bit of it, not the whole. If you tell the whole, it’ll stop being secret, won’t it?”

The story bag started speaking, pronouncing every syllable most distinctly.

“Very well. I shall just tell a bit, not the whole. You mustn’t interrupt or ask questions while I’m speaking. If you interrupt. . . .”

“Don’t worry,” said Papier-Mâché Cock smugly. “I won’t interrupt.”

“Suppose we ask questions?” put in Velvet Duck.

“I won’t answer them,” said the story bag. “Or only very simply. I’m starting now. You’re all to imagine that I’m Next-Time Port — right? I’ve changed into Next-Time Port.”

Here is the story told by the story bag.

My name is Next-Time Port. There's no morning or evening here, no wind or waves, no boats putting in to port and no boats sailing.

But a long, long time ago I was quite different. In those days I had mornings and evenings like anywhere else. In the bright morning sunshine everybody was fresh and gay: the children went to school and the grown-ups set about their work.

(Baby Bear couldn't help asking: "Was playing allowed in those days?")

Of course playing was allowed! After school or work, playing is such good fun! When the shades of night fell in the evening, young and old closed their eyes and fell sound asleep.

In those days I had wind and waves here like anywhere else. When a breeze sprang up waves slapped softly against the shore, and during great gales huge breakers rose and fell. But the sailors were not afraid of the wind and waves. From dawn till dusk there were boats putting in and boats putting out to sea.

But then I changed. . . .

("Why?" asked Hsi.)

Why? It wasn't my fault! It was the fault of some lazy children. Those lazy children didn't like there to be any morning, because if there was a morning they had to get up and go to school. They didn't like evening either, because if there was an



evening they had to go to bed and sleep. Once in bed they didn't like getting up again, and once up they didn't like going to bed. Lazy, eh? But they'd plenty of energy when it came to playing.

("I know, you mean me," said Hsi.)

Do I? Well, you think it over. Let me go on.

They kept forgetting morning and evening, till morning and evening stopped coming here.

("Even without morning and evening we've day-time," said Papier-Mâché Cock.)

Yes, there's day-time. And in the day-time you have to do lessons. They found a way out of that. They started saying: "I'll do it next time. I'll learn it next time. I can start next time."

Why do you suppose they kept talking about "next time"?

("So as not to do their lessons now!" They all answered at once.)

Yes! They used to say "this once" too. When there were lessons to be done they said "next time," but when they wanted to play it was always "this once." Gradually I started using "next time" too. If I had any serious work to do, I said "next time." Always "next time," "next time," till I became as lazy as those lazy children.

The weather here became lazy too, and there was no wind. The water went to sleep, and there were no waves. All the boats here learned to say

"next time" too, and stopped sailing. Even the flowers here picked up the habit, and stopped blossoming. That's why now I'm called Next-Time Port.

Then one day three of the laziest rascals came here. . . .

("Do you mean Tin Soldier and that lot?" asked Hsi.)

Yes! Tin Soldier, White Porcelain Man and Grey Rat. They were so lazy that they couldn't stay anywhere else, and so they sneaked in here. Later they became the masters here. They won't lift a finger, but make others wait on them. First they tried to get those lazy children to wait on them, but as the lazy children weren't any use, they made someone not quite so lazy wait on them. And what happened after that you know.

("But what's to be done?" asked Hsi. "We all want to go away. Can you make the boats here sail?")

I can. The boats here will start sailing once I become active again. I shall become active once I am strong again. And I shall be strong once the yellow orioles start to sing again.

("How can we get the yellow orioles to sing again?" asked Rubber Dog.)

There is a way. If Old Dough Man imitates the oriole's song on his flute, the real orioles will start

singing. When the yellow orioles sing, I shall be strong. Only then. . . .

("Go on!" said Rag Doll. "What then?")

Only then, Old Dough Man will have no strength left. Because then he'll be old and weak. He may even die. . . .

The story bag stopped here.

At once Rag Doll turned pale again.

"How dreadful!" she said. "We mustn't let him die! We mustn't!"

"Don't you believe it!" said Old Dough Man. "If the yellow orioles sing again, I shall become stronger. That's another secret which I mustn't tell you. . . ."

Just then they heard a great bellow from outside:

"They're in the tower! They're in the tower! Catch 'em! Catch 'em! Hurry up and catch them!"

Tin Soldier and the others had found them again.

## **25. Tin Soldier's Gang Attacks**

"Surrender! Give yourselves up! If you don't, we'll attack!" Standing in a row down below, the three rascals shouted up at them.

They were dressed up in a very odd way. Tin

Soldier and White Porcelain Man had steel helmets on their heads, and had wrapped themselves round and round with string. Tin Soldier had a long sword, White Porcelain Man a long spear. As Grey Rat was so short, all he could carry was a small wooden club, and instead of a helmet he had an extraordinary hat made of a shield. Because he had no helmet, he was wearing this shield on his head.

Papier-Mâché Cock was frightened to see them dressed like this.

"Why are you angry?" he asked. "Why not talk things over quietly instead of shouting?"

Tin Soldier brandished his long sword.

"It suits me to be angry. It's no business of yours!" he yelled. "This is *my* tower, mine! You've no right to be there."

White Porcelain Man brandished his spear.

"Right!" he said. "This is Tin Soldier's storehouse. I'm bursting with rage, I tell you, because you've gone up there without his permission. You didn't ask my permission either. Another thing, you ran away without a word. It's too bad of you — I'm fairly bursting with rage. Another thing. . . ."

"Don't talk so much!" Tin Soldier nudged him. "Tell them to surrender and look sharp about it."

White Porcelain Man nodded politely.

"All right. Let's shout together."

Together the three of them shouted:

"Sur — ren — der!"

Hsi looked round at his friends.

"Let's tell them we're not going to. One, two. . . ."

From the tower they shouted back:

"We won't!"

"If you don't surrender, we'll attack!" Tin Soldier looked up. "We shan't be so polite this time!"

"Come on! We're not afraid," growled Baby Bear.

"Look at you!" whispered the cock to Baby Bear. "What would you do if they really attacked? Can we beat them?"

"Papier-Mâché Cock's afraid!" said Rubber Dog. "Papier-Mâché Cock's afraid!"

"What! What!" said Velvet Duck. "Let's shout again."

Once more they all shouted together:

"You . . . don't . . . dare . . . come . . . up!"

The three scoundrels talked it over down below, and made Grey Rat their spokesman.

"Give us some of the food in there, and we may not attack," he called.

"Never!" answered Old Dough Man.

“Not even a little?” asked Grey Rat. “Just a very little will do. We’re rather hungry.”

“No, no!” they shouted in chorus from the tower.

Tin Soldier was furious. He waved his sword and ordered his two henchmen:

“Fall in! Call the roll!”

White Porcelain Man and Grey Rat fell in at once.

“One!” shouted White Porcelain Man.

“Two!” shouted Grey Rat.

“Now attack the tower!” Tin Soldier ordered them.

White Porcelain Man and Grey Rat looked at each other, and neither dared go up.

“Go on!” said White Porcelain Man to Grey Rat after a pause. “You’ve a shield on your head to protect you. Go on up!”

“What about you?” asked Tin Soldier. “You’ve a steel helmet on your head.”

White Porcelain Man gave a huge yawn, and drawled:

“I’m too fat. The doctors won’t let me tire myself. Aiya! The doctors don’t want me to talk too much either. You’d better go up with Grey Rat. I must ask to be excused.”

“So you’re too fat!” retorted Tin Soldier. “Haven’t you noticed that I’m too thin? My doctor

told me not to fight anyone. So Grey Rat had better go up."

"Yes," agreed White Porcelain Man at once. "Let Grey Rat go up alone."

"I can't." Grey Rat blinked. "I'm too small."

Tin Soldier waved his long sword angrily.

"Cowards!" he bellowed. "Watch me! I'll attack alone!"

With his chest thrown out he charged towards the tower, but it was too high for him to jump up. So he picked up a stone and threw it. Crash! He broke a window-pane.

"Missed us! Missed us!" howled Rubber Dog gleefully.

Papier-Mâché Cock hid under a table.

"Hurry up and shut the windows!" he squawked. "Once the windows are shut we'll be safe."

Tin Soldier threw a few more stones, without hitting anyone. When he kept this up, Baby Bear lost his temper and hurled down a couple of tins.

The three scallywags took to their heels. But when White Porcelain Man looked back and saw the tins, he turned and picked one up. Grey Rat, who had sharp eyes, snatched up the other.

When Tin Soldier saw what they had, he tried to grab the tins.

"That's mine!" he shouted.

"Mine!" shouted White Porcelain Man.

"Mine!" shouted Grey Rat.

"Mine! . . . Mine! . . . Mine! . . ." They bellowed together, and started fighting each other.

Hsi and his friends watched, laughing. Even Rag Doll laughed. When Papier-Mâché Cock heard them he crawled out from under the table. Then he started laughing too.

As the three hoodlums were still fighting, Rubber Dog threw down one of Tin Soldier's stones which hit Tin Soldier right smack on his back. Tin Soldier fell down with a bang. But he scrambled up to grab the stone, thinking it another tin.

"Help!" screamed Grey Rat. "They've got stones! Run for your lives!"

They turned and ran like the wind. And strangely enough fat White Porcelain Man was the fastest.

## **26. Hsi and Baby Bear Stand Sentry**

Hsi and his friends were so tickled when the scallywags ran away that they laughed and laughed till they couldn't laugh any more, however much they wanted to. They could not even make a noise like laughing.

"I must laugh once more . . ." said Baby Bear. He opened wide his mouth to get out a "Ho."



But after a long, long time all that came out was a "Ya . . . ah . . . yoh!" Not a laugh but a yawn.

Funnily enough, after Baby Bear yawned, Rubber Dog, Wooden Man, Rag Doll, Papier-Mâché Cock and Old Dough Man yawned too.

"I'm not going to yawn again," said Baby Bear. "Ya . . . ah . . . yoh! Hey, what's the matter? My tongue's swollen. Ya . . . ho . . . yoh! Really. . . ."

He gave several more yawns. All of them yawned and yawned, all except Velvet Duck who was fast asleep already. They all seemed to be sleepy. Though there was no night here, people slept when they were tired. After Velvet Duck dropped quietly off, Rubber Dog fell asleep in the middle of a yawn, his mouth wide open.

"Time to sleep." Papier-Mâché Cock half closed his eyes. "I'll sing to you when I wake."

"Ummm . . . sleep." Baby Bear closed his eyes. "Ummm . . . sing."

"Here!" called Hsi. "What's going to happen if Tin Soldier comes back and finds us all asleep?"

"They're afraid." Papier-Mâché Cock opened one eye. "They won't dare come. Go to sleep."

Wooden Man's tongue had grown swollen too.

"If . . . they come . . . what . . . shall . . . we do?"

"Teach 'em a lesson," mumbled Baby Bear.

"Let's leave two people on guard," suggested Hsi. "The rest can sleep. What do you say?"

"Good," said Papier-Mâché Cock. "What? I didn't hear. I can't hear. I'm asleep."

He hastily closed his eyes and said no more.

"We two will do sentry duty," said Hsi to Baby Bear. "Let the others sleep."

"We're sentries." Baby Bear rubbed his eyes. "Let the others sleep. Let 'em sleep. Good."

So Hsi and Baby Bear mounted guard. Baby Bear held a stick over one shoulder like a real soldier. With this stick he marched up and down by the window. He kept his eyes wide open and stared outside.

Soon the rest were asleep. And Velvet Duck started gabbling in her dreams:

"I won't go to bed, so there! . . . Next time, next time. . . . The bell's broken. . . . Two apples. . . ."

Baby Bear yawned again. At once he gazed out of the window and said to Hsi:

"Sentries on night duty don't sleep. Look at me — I'm not asleep."

"They don't yawn either," said Hsi.

"No, they don't yawn either."

Baby Bear opened his eyes as wide as he could. But before long they started closing again.

"Why don't they come yet?" he asked.

"Yes, why not?" repeated Hsi.

"I'm not going to sleep, not me . . . aaah." Baby Bear's tongue seemed to have grown stiff again. He gave another yawn, and so did Hsi.

"A . . . a . . . ah," yawned Baby Bear presently. "Why don't they come? I'm sleepy."

"Let's start counting." Hsi had an idea. "That'll wake us up."

"Honestly? Count how much?"

"To a hundred."

"Suppose they still don't come after we've counted a hundred?"

"Then we can start again."

"We'll count lots and lots of hundreds." Baby Bear cheered up. "Then I shan't be sleepy all night, eh? Let me start."

"All right. To count up to a hundred is very easy, but you mustn't make any mistakes." Meaning to help Baby Bear, Hsi talked like an arithmetic teacher again.

"Suppose there are a hundred apples, all of them yours, and you count wrongly — you won't get your hundred, will you?"

"You mean I have so many apples?" Baby Bear was surprised and pleased. "Here goes then, 1,2,3,4. . . ."

When he had counted up to 32, his tongue started playing tricks again. This time Hsi was the

first to give a tremendous yawn, and Baby Bear gave another.

These two yawns made Baby Bear forget how far he had gone.

"Where was I?" he asked.

"I don't know. Start again."

Baby Bear started once more from one. But after twenty he got muddled up again.

"21, ummm, 23, 32, 33 . . . umm . . . 30, 11, 12. . . ."

Hsi's tongue seemed swollen too.

"No," he mumbled. "18 . . . 10 . . . 16. . . ."

"17, 18," went on Baby Bear. "9, 90, 91, 62. . . ."

Just then Papier-Mâché Cock spoke in his sleep.

"I can sing. What's so wonderful about you?"

"What's so wonderful about *you*!" growled Baby Bear furiously. "I shan't give you any of my apples. 45, 6, 7, 8, 90, 91, 21, 31, 45. . . ."

No one knows exactly when Baby Bear closed his eyes. His stick had long since dropped to the bottom of the tower. And no one knows exactly when Hsi closed his eyes either. They both fell fast asleep. Baby Bear snored with his head on a tin of biscuits. Hsi used Baby Bear as his pillow, and found him a very comfortable pillow too.

## 27. They Are Taken Prisoner

"Don't move! Hands up!"

Hsi was woken by this shout. Heavens! Tin Soldier, White Porcelain Man and Grey Rat had managed to climb up the tower. They were armed and pointing their weapons at our friends, who were still asleep.

"You are all prisoners now!" gloated Tin Soldier. "Do you know that — all my prisoners?"

"I don't know." Baby Bear was talking in his sleep. His eyes were still half closed, and he started counting: "26, 7, 6 . . . 1, 2, 3 . . . what? The three bad eggs!"

Grey Rat angrily hit Baby Bear over the head with his club.

"Silly fool of a bear, put up your hands!"

That woke Baby Bear completely. He wanted to stand up, but Tin Soldier flourished his glittering sword.

"Don't move!" he shouted.

By now they had all woken up.

The last to wake was Papier-Mâché Cock, who didn't see Tin Soldier and the other two. Stretching happily, he said to no one in particular:

"Oh, my! What a lovely sleep I've had — like eating a big apple! I had such a long and amusing

dream. I dreamed I was standing on Tin Soldier's head, and I sang a song there. . . ."

Tin Soldier promptly kicked him.

"Who'd let you stand on my head? Who'd listen to your song?"

"You don't have to listen!" Papier-Mâché Cock was rather flustered. "I shan't be singing for you. Why should you kick me?"

"Because we feel like it!" retorted White Porcelain Man. "Because you're our prisoner. You're all our prisoners, and we can kick whichever of you we like. You think kicking's easy? It's not. You have to use strength, and that's extremely tiring. So you've no cause to complain when we kick you."

"Well! Who ever heard of such a thing . . ."

grumbled Papier-Mâché Cock quietly.

The three scallywags were ravenous. They grabbed all the food they could, and squatted down to eat. They ate like cats, purring as they stuffed themselves.

Tin Soldier purred:

"Sugar's sweet, not like meat! It's not too late to put on weight! . . ."

White Porcelain Man purred:

"I wanna lose weight, just one more date. I wanna be thin, just one more tin! . . ."

Grey Rat purred:

"Sweet, sweet, sweet! What a treat! . . ."

They went on eating and eating for no one knows how long, until they had finished all the food in the tower, and were nearly bursting.

Tin Soldier lit a long cigarette and rubbed his belly.

"That's better!" he purred. "Now I'll divide the prisoners. I have first say. Rag Doll is mine. I want Baby Bear too. And . . . and. . . ."

"What about me?" put in White Porcelain Man. "Who are you giving me?"

"You can have Velvet Duck."

"I don't want her!" White Porcelain Man was cross. "She's so silly she can't do a thing. She can't even speak distinctly. I want Old Dough Man, because he's very clever and can do whatever you tell him."

"Is that true?" asked Tin Soldier. "In that case, I'll have Old Dough Man too. You can have Papier-Mâché Cock."

"Papier-Mâché Cock can sing," said Grey Rat. "It's a good idea to give him to White Porcelain Man."

"Have you forgotten I'm an invalid?" demanded White Porcelain Man peevishly. "I don't like listening to songs, they keep me awake, you know. Of course I like to hear that song Tin Soldier made, and to sing it too. But I can't bear any other

songs. If you like Papier-Mâché Cock, you have him. I want Rubber Dog."

After a lengthy discussion they gave Rag Doll, Old Dough Man and Baby Bear to Tin Soldier, Rubber Dog and Velvet Duck to White Porcelain Man, Hsi and Papier-Mâché Cock to Grey Rat. That left only Wooden Man, whom none of them wanted.

"Wooden Man is no use at all!" said Tin Soldier. "He looks such a clown, and he says he has real tears!"

"Kill him!" said White Porcelain Man. "Then he won't have any tears!"

"That's it! Kill him! Kill him!" agreed Grey Rat.

"No, no, no!" Tin Soldier shook his head. "Don't be in such a hurry. Let's have a song first. After that we'll kill Wooden Man. Now, ready!"

Tin Soldier started singing at the top of his voice, and White Porcelain Man and Grey Rat joined in, with quavering voices. Tin Soldier was in such high spirits that he closed his eyes, rocked his head and started dancing.

Wooden Man started crying. So did Rag Doll. But the three scoundrels paid no attention. "Hu — lu . . . hu — lu — lu — lu, hu — lu — lu — lu! . . ." The din grew louder and louder, Tin Soldier danced faster and faster, and Grey Rat



started screaming "Bravo!" White Porcelain Man was so carried away by the music that he grabbed an empty biscuit tin and started using it as a drum. Tum-tum-tum, tum-tum-tum, tum-tum-tum! . . .

## **28. Time Comes Back**

Suddenly Tin Soldier jumped up and shrieked: "Help! Help! Where's that bell? I heard a bell."

"What! A bell?" Grey Rat took fright too.

"Don't be afraid," said White Porcelain Man. "It's only me beating this biscuit tin."

"Oh, is it?" snarled Tin Soldier. "Well, don't do it. I forbid you to do that again! Biscuit tins may not be bells, but this sounded so like a bell that it gave me the creeps."

White Porcelain Man put down the biscuit tin and picked up a bottle. He threw back his head and swilled the wine greedily.

"Have a drink! Have a drink!" he shouted. "Don't be afraid, we shall never hear a bell again, because Time will never come back. We've won. Fetch me another bottle, Rubber Dog."

"Get me a bottle too," said Grey Rat to Papier-Mâché Cock. "Yes, we needn't be afraid. We've won. We can drink as much as we like. . . ."

"We can play as long as we like too," said Tin Soldier. "Marvellous! I still feel a little uneasy all the same. Rag Doll, bring me some wine."

"You'll feel better when you've had a drink," said White Porcelain Man. "Let's drink till we're tipsy and then go to sleep. We can sleep as long as we like, there's no one to stop us. Oh, but we mustn't forget to kill Wooden Man."

Wooden Man was crying, and his heart was thumping loudly — pu-tung, pu-tung! Rag Doll was crying too. So was Velvet Duck. And Hsi felt most upset. What could they do to save poor Wooden Man?

"After this bottle we'll polish him off," said Grey Rat.

"That's it!" said Tin Soldier. "In one minute!" Hsi suddenly had an idea.

"They're going to kill Wooden Man," he whispered. "Don't be angry, Mr. Time! Please come back next time — no, now, I mean! Come right away! Hurry!"

What an extraordinary thing! Hsi had spoken so softly that no one else could hear him, but no sooner had he finished than Time came in through the window. Somehow or other he had heard.

Time was dressed just as before and was still on a bicycle. Hsi was the only one to notice him. Time moved very, very quietly. He smiled and

waved at Hsi. Then in a flash he rode up the rope into the big bell. He had certainly kept his word. He had said he would come back only if Hsi wanted him, and now the moment Hsi called to him here he was without a sound. When he was inside the bell, it rocked very gently twice.

"Can the bell ring now?" wondered Hsi.

Time seemed to have heard him again, for he peeped out from under the bell and signed to Hsi to pull the rope.

Hsi tiptoed to the rope, and pushed it with one foot.

"Dong!" called the bell softly.

Tin Soldier leaped to his feet and hit White Porcelain Man hard.

"Why did you bang that tin again?" he shouted. "Didn't I tell you not to?"

White Porcelain Man hastily stopped his ears, quite bewildered.

"But I didn't! Really I didn't!" he protested. "That sounded like a bell. . . ."

In a great temper, Tin Soldier cut him short.

"No, no, no! That wasn't a bell! You're such a coward you thought it was a bell. Have you forgotten that the bell is dumb? All the alarm clocks, striking clocks and bells are dumb, so we shall never hear clocks or bells again. You're such a coward that you're raving."

White Porcelain Man hunched his shoulders.

"But it really sounded like a bell . . ." he insisted.

"No, no, no!" Tin Soldier shook his fist. "It wasn't a bell! It wasn't! Liar!"

"It pro-probably wasn't." Grey Rat was trembling. "But it did remind me of a bell, and of an alarm clock too. I felt as if someone were telling me to go and do something again."

White Porcelain Man picked up his bottle and gulped down some more wine.

"Pay no attention!" he said. "Have another drink. Drink makes a man brave."

But Tin Soldier was worried. He frowned as he produced a long cigarette.

"I must smoke. I must smoke. If I smoke I shan't be afraid. Was that really a bell just now? Are you sure you didn't bang the biscuit tin? Tell me the truth — was it really a bell? If it was, where did the sound come from? I must smoke. I must smoke! . . ."

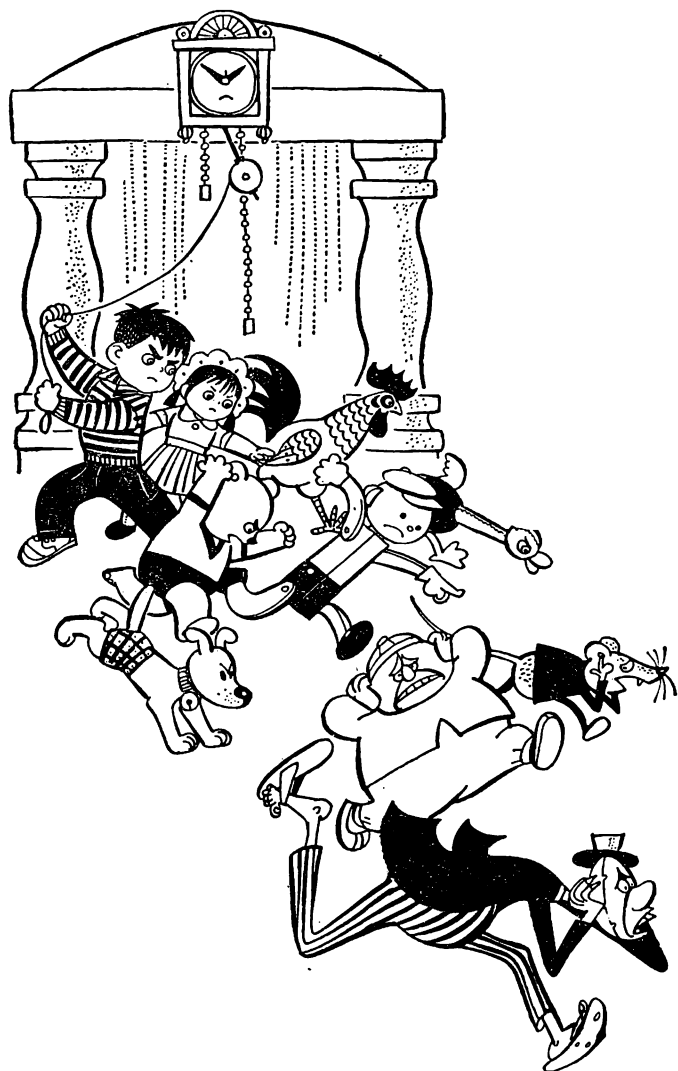
Hsi seized the rope with both hands.

"Listen!" he shouted. "This is a real bell ringing, a beautiful, beautiful chime!"

He pulled with all his might. The bell swung once, and let out a glorious peal:

"Dong! Dong! . . ."

The three rascals fell over in fright.



"The bell's ringing again!" screamed Tin Soldier, scrambling up. "Run! Run for your lives!"

He was the first to jump out of the window.

White Porcelain Man and Grey Rat had fainted away. After some time they struggled to their feet and jumped out of the window too.

Hsi pulled hard on the rope again.

"Dong! Dong! . . ."

When the three rogues running away below the tower heard this, terror made them trip over again. They got up and stopped their ears. Then, bumping and jostling each other, they took to their heels once more. They rushed off without a look behind, and in a twinkling had disappeared completely.

## **29. The Imitation Oriole and the True One**

When the three rascals were frightened away by the bell, Hsi and his friends jumped for joy, and clapped and cheered. Papier-Mâché Cock suddenly craned his neck and crowed: "Cock-a-doodle-doo!" He did have a terrible voice: loud, but rough and cracked. They were all so happy, though, that this didn't bother them, and some of them even applauded. Then Baby Bear balanced a bottle on his head and started dancing.

"Bravo! Bravo!" cried Old Dough Man. He produced his flute and said to it: "Now it's your turn. Give us a good song!"

With his head a little on one side, Old Dough Man started playing. He played a tune that golden orioles love, his flute imitating the notes of an oriole. First there were some songs with rather simple melodies. The pure, clear notes of the flute repeated each song.

Then the flute played in an ecstasy, as if summer had come and an oriole hidden among green leaves was praising the fleecy clouds and the golden sunlight, praising fun, sport and life.

The notes trembled and the flute passed on to more varied melodies. Black clouds seemed to be racing across the sky, branches were thrashing wildly, huge raindrops were swirling down on to the ponds, and petals were whirling madly in the gale. But soon the downpour ended, and the sun came out again in a clear blue sky, so that each round raindrop on the leaves glittered and sparkled. A yellow oriole was advising its mate: "Be patient! Don't worry! Your wet feathers will soon be dry, and we can fly off again."

The flute played on and on, faster and faster. Now it was morning in the forest, and several orioles were trying to outsing each other, to see whose airs had most variety, whose notes were roundest,

whose songs had most of love, whose voice was sweetest.

Old Dough Man swayed as he played. More wrinkles appeared on his forehead, his eyebrows pressed lower and lower, and his face turned whiter and whiter.

Hsi had his hands tightly clasped. Rag Doll was staring as if she were in a trance. Wooden Man had his head in his hands. Rubber Dog was beating the time softly with his tail. That conceited look had gone from Papier-Mâché Cock's face. And Velvet Duck was gaping. Each one of them was carried away by the music.

Old Dough Man sighed deeply, and his flute passed to a gay and beautiful tune, a song of perfect happiness. Yet joyous as this was it held a note of restlessness, as if a young oriole were searching passionately for its mate, soaring up and alighting again, flitting from tree to tree, then flying off to some distance. It flew on and on, singing as it went as if it did not know what weariness was.

"Listen!" whispered Hsi. "What's that sound in the distance?"

Yes, what was it? What was it, indeed?

Far, far away a real oriole had started to sing. The sound was faint, yet strong and clear. It was simple yet sweet, like a mountain brook, a silk gir-



dle fluttering in the wind, or a dewdrop rolling on a lotus leaf.

Old Dough Man had heard the real oriole too. He winked at the others as he went on playing. He played on and on, his face growing whiter and whiter. He smiled, his eyes flashed, and two tears rolled down his cheeks.

The imitation oriole sang with all its might, while the true one followed it lightly and merrily. Each note of the flute was answered by the bird. Little by little the oriole drew near, and its voice became clearer and clearer.

Then a second oriole joined in, and a third, until many of them were singing.

The orioles seemed to be chanting: "The season of warmth is here, bright summer is here! Grow, children! Jump, run and fly! All that is best on earth is yours, and all that is best in the water and the air. All the best in existence is yours, as well as all that has not yet come into being. Time is with you, the future is with you, hope is with you. Don't frown and look sad! Don't sigh! Start now, at once, right away! Don't wait till 'next time'! Now that you know how careful you should be, Time will never leave you again. Here are warmth, happiness and fun — let us jump and shout and laugh!"

While the orioles were singing so joyfully, other birds joined in — magpies, swallows, cuckoos and other small feathered creatures. Presently the wind could be heard, the sighing of trees, flowing rivers and the breakers of the sea.

Little by little, the frozen clouds in the sky came to life and started moving. Great raindrops fell from the clouds. After this sudden shower a brilliant rainbow spanned the azure sky. A soft breeze blew into the tower, and golden sunbeams darted through the windows.

“The flowers! The flowers!” cried Rag Doll in delight. “The flowers have opened!”

It was true. Suddenly there were flowers of every kind blooming outside. Purple lilac, red flowering plum, brilliant peonies, morning-glory over all the fences, lotus on all the ponds, and countless sturdy dahlias of every colour. No one knows when exactly the change came to Next-Time Port!

### **30. Young Dough-Man**

Rag Doll had good eyes. Through the window she could see all the boats in the port were moving.

“Look, look!” she cried. “Ever so many boats have put in, and ever so many more are setting sail!”

"What! Let me see!" But Rubber Dog couldn't see so far. Though he strained his eyes he couldn't see anything clearly. So he sniffed hard instead.

"Yes!" he said. "I can smell it. The boats are under way."

"Honestly?" Velvet Duck was thrilled. "I want to take a boat to find my mother. Come on quick to the port. I want lots and lots of boats."

"You don't need lots and lots — one will do," said Baby Bear. "We can all go home on one boat."

"That's right," agreed the others. "Let's go home. Come on!"

Just then Wooden Man broke in:

"Ter . . . rible . . . Old Dough Man . . . dead."

"What! Old Dough Man dead!"

It was true. Old Dough Man was dead. No one had noticed when he stopped playing his flute or when he had lain down quietly by himself. His eyes and mouth were closed, and he still had the flute in his hand. He had played his last tune. He would never make music for them again. They hung their heads and felt quite heart-broken.

"He was such a good fellow," said Hsi. "Good Old Dough Man."

"But he wasn't old at all," said Rubber Dog. "He oughtn't to have died!"

"He was a hero, a real hero!" said Papier-Mâché Cock. "We must always remember him."

"He was ever so kind," said Baby Bear.

"Maybe he isn't dead," said Velvet Duck.  
"Maybe he's only sleeping."

Wooden Man couldn't say anything, but his heart was thudding — pu-tung, pu-tung — again. He was rolling his eyes, a sure sign that the tears were coming.

Rag Doll went out and picked a flower, a beautiful, fragrant violet. She knelt by Old Dough Man and held it up in front of him.

"Look, look!" she whispered. "This is a real flower, a real flower. . . ."

But Old Dough Man didn't open his eyes or smell it.

Rag Doll put the flower in his buttonhole, and hung her head to cry. In fact, they all shed tears.

After a long, long time Papier-Mâché Cock said:

"We mustn't take this too much to heart. Let's go and bury Old Dough Man."

"What does 'bury' mean?" asked Velvet Duck.

"It means putting him in the ground, as if you were planting something," explained Hsi.

"Are we going to plant Old Dough Man in the ground?" asked Baby Bear.

"Oh, good!" said Rubber Dog. "Then maybe another Old Dough Man will grow."

"You don't understand," said Papier-Mâché Cock. "A whole lot of old dough men may grow."

"Goody, goody!" shouted Baby Bear. "I'll go with you."

"Me too!" cried Velvet Duck.

"And me!" said Rubber Dog.

"What? Where to? Take me too." Old Dough Man jumped up suddenly. "Why are you crying? What's the matter?"

Another extraordinary thing had happened. Old Dough Man had come to life again, and turned into a young dough man. He'd been nearly bald, with a long beard, but now somehow or other he had plenty of hair and no beard at all. So it wouldn't be right to go on calling him Old Dough Man — we had better change his name to Young Dough Man.

Young Dough Man looked round and greeted them all gaily:

"How are you? How are you? What are you crying about? Silly kids! Look, I'm as fresh as if I were newly made. I shall never frown or lose my temper again, and you're not to call me Old Dough Man any more."

"Right!" said Velvet Duck. "You're Young

Dough Man. Your beard's all gone back to your head, hasn't it?"

"No!" protested Baby Bear. "People don't have beards on their heads. They have eyebrows."

"Hair," said Wooden Man.

Young Dough Man roared with laughter.

"Never mind whether it's a beard, eyebrows or hair," he said. "Now my strength has come back, I can play the flute, I can swim, I can skate. We can have a lot of fun together in future, don't you agree?"

"Oh, yes! How lovely!" they cried.

### **31. The End**

Now this story is nearing its end.

After Old Dough Man had turned into Young Dough Man, he and the others went straight to the wharf. The notices on all the boats had been changed to "Sailing at Once" or "Sailing Now." Naturally smoke was coming from all the funnels, and all the masts had been rigged. Sirens were hooting, bells ringing and gongs sounding. All was noise and bustle. The sea had changed colour too, and was now like sea anywhere else. Waves were tumbling gently, and seagulls were skimming over the water.

Hsi and his friends chose the smartest yacht in sight. They all went merrily aboard, all but Young Dough Man who wanted to stay behind to look after the yellow orioles and flowers, because he was afraid Tin Soldier and his cronies might harm them. Though he wasn't leaving himself, Young Dough Man gave his friends the green story bag, so that they could listen to stories during the journey.

Just before the boat left they suggested that Young Dough Man should find another name for Next-Time Port. As there would always be wind and waves, morning and evening here now, and all the boats could sail, it wouldn't be right to call it Next-Time Port any more. After talking it over they agreed to change its name to Story Port.

Of course the parting between our friends and Young Dough Man, who was going to stay in Story Port for ever, was a very sad one, they went on waving to each other and shouting "Goodbye!" till the



yacht was some way out to sea.

And so Hsi went home. Because when children leave home, no matter how far they go, if they don't forget their mothers, their mothers won't forget them, and in the end they are sure to reach home again. As to whether Hsi finally did those sums, whether the alarm clock was really broken, and if so whether it was ever mended — I am not too clear on these points. All I know is that after this Hsi gradually understood certain things, such as the right way to treat lessons and play. Still, I can't talk about this because I haven't discussed it with Hsi yet.

Another thing — little by little Hsi grew another shadow of his own. Naturally this shadow wasn't a troublesome chatterbox. And Hsi will never lose this shadow again.

As to where Rag Doll, Baby Bear and the others went, what happened to them and what they did, I have even less intention of telling you that. Because that's another long story in itself, and for a story to go on and on, without ever coming to an end, is very bad indeed!



## The Bee and the Earthworm

Once upon a time the bee and the earthworm were not only on very good terms, but even looked alike.

In those days the earthworm was not afraid of the daylight, and did not live in the earth and keep silent all day long, but sang. Then it was fat, with a large head, and even had legs, though admittedly short ones. No one nowadays would recognize it as an earthworm.

The bee was also quite different. It could not secrete honey nor make honeycomb, nor could it fly, for it had no wings. Its body was shorter than the earthworm's. It had six short legs, but they were not so neat and



nimble as they are today. No one nowadays would recognize it as a bee.

In the days when the earthworm had legs and the bee had no wings there grew lots of delicious things on earth, such as strawberries and grapes, and other delicious red and purple berries which we don't know the names of. And there was lovely fresh, sweet grass, and beautiful flowers. The bee and the earthworm could easily eat their fill without the slightest exertion.

When they had had enough, they played together — there was nothing to separate them. Who nowadays has ever seen a bee playing with an earthworm? Now one flies in the air, and the other wriggles in the ground. They never cross one another's path. Neither do they look at all alike. In fact, they've changed tremendously since those days. How has this come about? Let us start the story from the beginning.

In those old, old days, there were many lovely things to eat, but gradually these became less and less, since everybody ate, but nobody took the trouble to plant anything. So finding things to eat became more and more difficult.

Eventually days of scarcity followed the old days of plenty. Hunger was all the bee and the earthworm tasted, until they could barely ever find even a mouthful.

The bee worried, yet the earthworm seemed not to care a scrap, but hummed and sang all day long. "Now, don't keep on that incessant singing, my friend." — The bee could bear it no longer. — "We must think of some way to make something to eat. All right?"

The earthworm was feeling perfectly happy, and replied testily, "Make! Make! What can *you* make? You do think yourself clever, don't you? Everything to eat comes ready made. How can you *make* it?"

The bee was reduced to silence by its friend's sarcastic remark. But this was the first time the two friends had ever had a difference of opinion.

But the bee loved using its brain. It was not content simply to think of some way to make anything to eat. It wanted to make something which was particularly sweet and tasty. But how? The bee racked its brains all the time.

One day it happened that it rained heavily. The two friends took shelter under a rock. The rain poured down and down, till the water rose and came up all over their feet. The bee was shivering with cold, what with the piercing wind and the pelting rain, so it said to the earthworm:

"If only we could live in the hole of a tree! That must be lovely and warm and cosy."

The earthworm was dozing away. It shook its head and said: "Don't talk nonsense. You are always thinking up impossibilities."

But the bee was pleased with its idea and said again, "Now, if we could build ourselves a . . . I don't know! Anyway, *something* to live in, it would be even better than a dry hole in a tree."

For in those days the bee was not able to make a comb, so it did not know what to call it.

But this remark made the earthworm angry. "Goodness, why are you so stupid? We've been sleeping under leaves and stones, and so have our ancestors, ever since they first existed. And now you want to build something to live in! What makes you so sure you *can* build anything? Stop talking rot and let me sleep in peace for a while."

This made the bee a bit annoyed, too, so it kept silent, but decided that it could and would make something to live in, and show the earthworm that it was possible.

The sky cleared. The bee tried to make a kind of cell with mud. It used all its legs to mix it up, pressed it into little flat cakes and then tried to make the separate cakes into one large one. It made several attempts, but they all failed. It tried again and at last succeeded in getting them to stick together. Then it tried to roll it up into a tube. It tried once, twice, thrice, but it just couldn't manage

it. Finally the bee, sweating all over, became so tired that it called out to the earthworm for help. "Give me a hand, my dear friend, will you, please?"

But the earthworm never stirred a foot, but only sniffed.

The mud began to dry up under the sun and could not be rolled any more. And the bee was tired out, so it stopped its labours and took a rest.

Then with a sneering air the earthworm said to the bee, "Well, my friend, don't waste your sweat any more. I told you it was no use."

The bee did not answer. It was racking its brains trying to work out how it could build a good house.

A few days later, when they were out looking for something to eat they came across a whitethorn, laden with small white flowers. It called out to them: "Hallo there, friends, can you come and assist me, please? I can bloom, but I can't bring forth fruit. I'll manage it if you'll help me shift the pollen. And I'll reward you nicely."

The earthworm glanced sideways at it and answered gruffly, "It's none of my business!"

But the bee said, "I'll have a try, if you like."

The whitethorn was most grateful, "Oh yes, indeed, please try."

"You're really meddlesome," said the earthworm to the bee. "Go ahead and try if you're not

afraid of trouble, but *I'll* have nothing to do with it." And it actually went off without a moment's hesitation and even hummed in a superior way as it went along.

The bee began to climb the tree with great difficulty. Its legs were short and clumsy, so it took a very long time to climb up the trunk. And then, just when it was getting near a flower it fell right off because its body was so clumsy. Thanks to some thick grass growing underneath it was not hurt, but got up slowly, rested a minute and started climbing again.

While the bee was labouring away, the earthworm had found a big bush of berries. Chewing a sweet berry, the earthworm thought of the bee and smiled in a very self-satisfied manner.

"There you are. I can lie down and eat to my heart's content, and don't have to exert myself at all. I wonder what my stupid friend bee is doing now. Maybe it's either wounded from falling off the tree, or else starving."

When it had its fill, it lay down beside the bush and slept.

Now all this time, the bee had been patiently trying to climb the tree. Once, twice, thrice. As the bee put out all its efforts, the hair on its back moved and shook, and the more it climbed, the more it kept on shaking. Gradually, strange as it

might seem, some of the hairs grew bigger and flatter and changed into four small wings, flapping in time with the bee's movements, and making its body lighter and steadier.

You can see why this was. If you stood on a high narrow door-sill, you would easily lose your balance. But without anyone telling you, you would instinctively raise your arms to balance your body and stand firmly again. The four small wings on the bee's back functioned rather like human arms, so with their help the bee found it could climb the tree quite steadily.

At this moment the earthworm was asleep, and enjoying pleasant dreams beside the bush of berries. He had no idea of the great changes that had come over the bee.

The four small wings on the bee's back grew bigger and bigger — in fact, to their present size. And the bee began to fly. It flew from one flower to the other, carrying the pollen. Its legs became very much more nimble through the steady work they were doing.

The whitethorn was highly grateful to the bee for helping, so it gave the bee all the spare pollen and nectar, and told it how the nectar could be made into something delicious which was called honey.

So off the bee flew with the pollen and nectar. But how was it going to make it into honey? A

tough job, no doubt about it! But the bee was patient and used its brain. When one way failed, it thought of another and tried again and again, until success came.

All this time the earthworm stayed in the same place, sleeping and eating in turn. It was too lazy even to sing, much less give a thought to its old friend.

Besides making honey the bee found out how to make wax, and the long-planned honeycomb nest. It built the nest in a hole in a tree, safe from rain and gusts. It lived in a cosy cell, got up early every morning, and worked busily till night.

The bee became more and more clever, competent and beautiful every day, until it had glittering, big eyes, delicate antennae and gauzy wings. Exactly what we see now, in fact.

One day the bee thought of the earthworm. It wanted the earthworm to taste the honey and learn its skill, so that the earthworm could also





work.

The bee left its nest and flew all over the place to look for the earthworm, calling for its old friend as it went. But where was it? The bee could not find it anywhere, even after looking for ages.

The fact was that during this long period, the earthworm had also gone through a great change. Its short legs became shorter every day, for lack of exercise. One day, after an extra long sleep, it woke up to find its legs had disappeared entirely. And it became dumb from being too lazy to speak or sing. Since it slept nearly all the time and did not use its brain at all, its head dwindled. But its greedy mouth became stronger, able to eat earth now, through so much chewing. Since it was too lazy to move it had to eat anything it could reach when the good things were gone and in the end there was nothing for it but to eat earth. So it became long and thin. In a word, it became unrecognizable. No wonder the bee didn't see it, though as a matter of fact it flew over it several times.

Of course the earthworm could not recognize the bee either. It wondered who it was calling its name. Then, one day, it heard the young white-thorns calling out, "Welcome, welcome to our good friend, the busy bee." The earthworm was thus made aware that this flying creature was its old friend. It felt ashamed and rueful, and immedi-



ately crept into a hole and cried.

The young whitethorns outside the hole tried to console it. "Don't cry. If you work too, and don't idle hereafter, everybody will welcome you as well."

The earthworm did not speak but meditated.

"That's right. I'll work and turn up earth to help the crops to grow better."

The earthworm thus decided to shake off its idleness and laziness once and for all. Even though mute, it could at least use its mouth to eat earth, to help turn it up and increase the fertility of the soil. And now everybody praises it for its diligence. But it is still too embarrassed to come out during day-time to show itself before its old friend the bee.

## As the Wind Blows

Many, many years ago, there lived a poor little boy, all by himself. His father and mother were both dead — they had died while he was still almost a baby — and he lived alone in a little hut in a wild and lonely place. For months on end no human soul came to talk to him, or play with him. Only one friend was ever kind to him . . . a strange friend, the Wind. The Wind was very fond of him and whenever she passed by his hut she would drop in, and have a chat, or play a while with him. It was the Wind who always brought him food. That was the only way this poor child could sustain life in such a desolate place.

One spring day the little boy fell ill. He waited in his lonely hut for ten days before the Wind came to see him. She was sorry to find him ill, and sat down by his bed-side to keep him company. As she talked, she caressed his hair fondly. The Wind loved travel, of course. She had just returned from a long journey, and she told the ailing child all



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about the curious things she had seen, and said she could tell that spring had come.

“Oh, has it?” asked the little boy eagerly. “How lovely, I remember once, when spring came before, that I liked being out then. I do want to go out now. It’s so dark here, all by myself, and I don’t have any fun.”

“Of course, you want to go out,” said the Wind, gently. “But you aren’t well. You can’t run out and play now.”

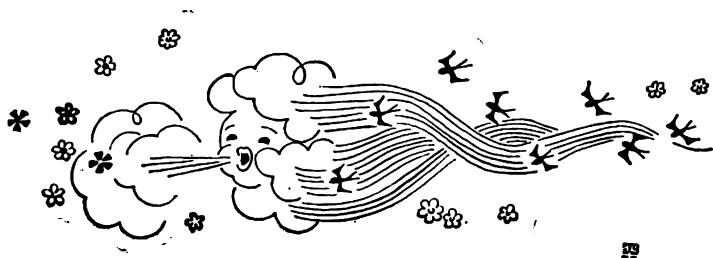
The little boy shook his head sadly. “No, I

can't walk, even. My legs don't hold me up, or else I would have gone out long ago." He sighed, then asked the Wind, "Are the flowers blossoming yet?"

"Yes, they are all in bloom. I can see them as I go. I have heard the birds singing, too."

The poor little invalid said, faintly, "Oh, I do long to hear the birds singing. What I like to do is to lie on the new green grass and listen to them, particularly the golden oriole. It's horrid, not being able to go out. . . ." His voice began to tremble, because he was nearly in tears. The Wind comforted him, and said, "My dear child, don't get upset. Just wait a minute, and I'll see what I can do. You'll see, I'll bring spring right into your room for you!"

The Wind swirled out with a rustle. In a few minutes back she came, bringing with her all the things the sick child was longing for. The scent of the spring flowers, the sweet smell of growing grass, and the voices of the birds.



"Oh, lovely," said the little invalid. "Spring is really here."

He happily fell asleep, and the Wind tiptoed out of the little hut, without making the smallest murmuring breeze.

It came to be full summer time, but the little boy was still ill. His friend the Wind came in to see him.

"It must be wonderful, outside," he said wistfully to her.

"Yes, it is," said the Wind. "The summer is here."

"How can you tell that it's summer?" he asked.

"I've shaken ripe fruit off the trees, so I know that it must be summer time."

When she said that the fruit was ripe, the little boy said, "*I should* like some fruit. Oh, if only I had a fresh peach to eat, I'm sure I should get well again."

"Very well," said the Wind. "Be patient, and I'll bring you a lovely one."

"Dear Wind, get me one quickly. I'm dying for one!" Away the Wind flew. She flew to an orchard, but there was a watchman there. No sooner did she shake a peach off a tree than it was picked up by the watchman. She couldn't take the peach out of his hands, so she blew away to look elsewhere.

There was a man on guard at the next orchard, too, and the Wind could get no fruit there either. She flew from orchard to orchard, but everywhere the watchmen were too sharp for her. She failed to get any fruit at all.

Now she began to worry. She felt she had been away a long time, and that the little boy would get worse, worrying. In the end she begged a wild apricot tree to let her have just one little apricot. She was nearly back at the hut by then. The apricot tree grew quite close.

When she came back, she found the little boy was worse, and could hardly speak. She caressed him gently, and he half woke up. He looked wearily at the little wild apricot, but shook his head and closed his eyes again. He was too ill, really, to eat anything at all.

The poor Wind! She was so unhappy. She felt that he would have been better if she could have brought him a fresh peach at once. But now she was too late. Her heart ached for the poor child, and when she rustled gently away, she could not help crying bitter tears.

It was autumn. The little boy was no better — in fact he was weaker than ever. The Wind came to see him again.

“Oh Wind, dear friend,” he sighed. “I’ve been in bed so long. Oh, how I want to go out for a little while.”

“I’m sure you do,” said the Wind, sympathetically, “but you are not strong enough. How can you go out?”

Tears rolled out of the little boy’s eyes. Indeed, he was so weak that he couldn’t sit up. How could he possibly go out?

“Don’t cry,” whispered the Wind. “We’ll have something for you right here, in front of your bed. Look, I’ll show you a whirling dance.” And she swirled and blew round and round his bed.

“Let’s all join in!” said the scarlet leaves just outside the door.

They jumped into the room and danced with the Wind. The Wind sang a stirring, exciting song as she twirled around. The little boy couldn’t help clapping his hands in time with the dance. Finally his head drooped and he fell asleep happily. The Wind drifted away without a sound.

Winter came, but the child was worse than ever, as the Wind found when she came to see him one day. His stove was bare of charcoal, and he had no cotton-padded clothes or quilt. He was shivering with cold when the Wind came, and had



no voice left. He could only whisper, faintly, "I'm so cold."

The Wind could see how he felt, and said, "Try and hold on. I'll go and get something to make you warmer. I'll be back as soon as possible."

She rushed off, and went first to a rich family's house. There she knew she would find a huge stove. There were several fat men sitting around, sweating in the intense heat. The Wind said, most politely, "Gentlemen, could I beg the favour of a little charcoal for a sick little boy who is near freezing to death?"

One of the great louts jumped up peevishly and shouted, "What's this? A little sick boy? We don't know him, nor care. It's nothing to do with us whether he lives or dies."

They chased the Wind out, and closed the window tight against her. The Wind went to several other rich households, but everywhere met with the same unkind refusal.

And then, when she was turned out yet again from a great house, she met a little girl who worked in the household as a maid, who said, "Good lady, I heard what you said to the master. I don't know your little friend, either, but I don't think he should be left to die of cold. I would like to do what I can to help."

She hadn't anything much herself, and had to rack her brains for a moment. Then she pulled out some cotton-padding from her own torn jacket — it was all she had in the world that she could give — and said to the Wind, "See if this cotton will help to keep him warm, and tell him I hope he'll get well soon."

"Thank you, my child," said the Wind gratefully, caressing the girl's hair. "You are a very kind little girl."

Clasping the cotton-padding, the Wind flew back, as fast as she could go, to the lonely hut. But she was too late. Her little friend was sleeping his eternal sleep. No more would he awaken to the hardships and loneliness of life again. The Wind sprinkled the cotton-padding over him, kissed and caressed him for the last time, and wept bitterly.

Then she could bear it no longer. She swirled up in a rage, and howled angrily, "You selfish people have no compassion in your heart. I'll sweep away your world! I'll cause you to suffer cold as you allowed the little boy to suffer!"

In a fury, she tore out of the room, spreading bitter cold air in all directions.

This is the story of how the wind comes to be so different in the four seasons of the year. It

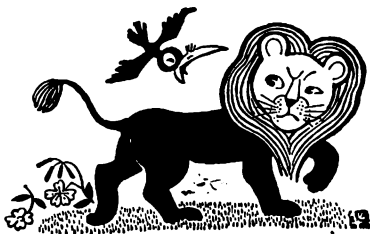
changes for the sake of the little lonely boy. In the spring, we enjoy the balmy sweet breeze, which first came to make the little boy happy, and bring him the scent of the flowers and the songs of the birds. Summer wind always brings rain . . . the Wind's tears as she laments over the sadness of the little boy who was too ill to eat the wild apricot. In the autumn we see the wild dance of the leaves with the Wind, singing shrilly as they fly. And the furious gales in winter bring the child's bitterness and cold to all selfish people, as the Wind swore it would. We still see the kind little maid's only gift, as flakes of cotton-padding blow down from the wind's grasp. The reason why you cannot use them to make a cotton-padded jacket is because the Wind will not let anyone else use it, as her little friend could not. When we catch it, it changes into water; we call it snow.



## The Red-Beaked Crow and the Little Fawn

One fine day, a red-beaked crow came fluttering after the lion, king of the beasts. Wherever the lion went, the crow followed. At first, the lion was annoyed and shouted menacingly at the crow. But the latter took no offense and continued to follow the lion. The lion was used to imposing his will on all the animals, but against this winged, patient creature he could not prevail. Threats were no use, so all the lion could do was to leave matters as they were. In the course of time, the lion came to like the crow; he no longer shouted at the bird and sometimes even let the crow sit on his back and rid him of ticks.

To reward the lion for such kindness, the crow composed many a paean singing the praises of



fierceness, strength and war. The crow did not sing badly, either. Every time the lion lay down to rest, the crow would pour out its best songs. But the lion was so ignorant and stupid that he found no pleasure in song, so whenever he heard the crow sing, he just stretched his limbs, yawned and fell asleep in a trice.

An unexpected result of the crow's singing was that it reached many peaceful animals in their hide-outs far away and moved everyone of them almost to tears. They had, one and all, so much suffering and grief to give vent to! The words of the crow's songs could not be clearly made out from afar, but the voice sounded full of real feeling. Listening to this seemingly touching voice, the animals made up words for the songs and fancied that the crow sang them. That was why they were so moved.

Most affected of all was a little fawn. This young creature admired the crow greatly and was very anxious to meet the singer of such wonderful songs. But being afraid of the lion, the fawn did not dare go nearer. He was very unhappy, though, and his desire to meet the crow grew stronger day by day.

But one day the fawn's wish came true. Not because he had plucked up enough courage to face the lion, but simply because he was caught by the latter and so was at last able to meet the crow. Since

the lion had just devoured a whole goat, his stomach was pleasantly full and he did not feel like gobbling up the fawn, which had been hurt in the hind legs and could not escape him anyway. So the lion threw his unfortunate victim down by his side and went to sleep.

The red-beaked crow, perched on a walnut tree close by, thereupon began to sing very softly. When the little fawn heard the song, he forgot all about his own pain and lifted his head towards the crow saying: "Oh, is it you, Master Crow? How beautifully you sing!"

The crow cast a careless glance over the fawn and answered, with head cocked proudly: "Ha, that's nothing! If I really put myself into it, I can do much better."

"I've been listening secretly to your singing many times, I have the greatest respect for you!"

The crow, with a show of surprise, eyed the fawn before replying:



"Oh, I didn't know that you too listened secretly to my songs! I only know that many other animals do."

"Yes, many of us like songs."

The crow only chuckled a contented "h'm, h'm!" while the fawn said with a sigh:

"Oh dear, what a pity I shall die so soon! I shan't be able to hear you sing any more. . . ."

"Yes, it is a shame, but there are many other animals left to hear me."

The little fawn then inquired with a sad smile: "Master Crow of the Red Beak, I almost forgot to ask you one thing. What are the words to your songs? Unfortunately, I usually hear you sing from a distance, so I don't hear very clearly. . . ."

"Are your ears really so useless? How stupid you are! Well, to tell you very simply — all I sing about are good things. For instance, virtue — the virtuousness of the lion; or bravery — the lion's bravery; and many, many other things, why, I can just go on and on! In short, a red-beaked crow doesn't sing of bad things."

"But isn't there something else? I seem to remember you sang of other things too. What was it that you sang that moved us all to tears?"

Hearing such compliments, the crow could hardly keep from breaking into song again, but managed to explain patiently:

“Oh, probably those were songs about the virtues of the animals, and also songs about the great, lofty emotions of the most honoured ones among them, about the lion’s amusements, the lion going hunting — about all sorts of profound and solemn matters, and also stories about how whole flocks of animals sacrifice themselves, so that the lion shall have something to eat. There are so many stories, I couldn’t possibly tell them all. Anyway, these songs are all about good things, too. A red-beaked crow never sings of anything bad.”

But the fawn still shook his head: “No, I’m sure these were not the things I heard.”

At this, the crow became very angry and shouted: “If it wasn’t those songs, then what were they?”

The fawn was frightened, but still he said in a low voice: “I told you I don’t know what they were, but I feel that the songs you’ve mentioned don’t mean much to me. And yet, I used to be deeply moved when I heard you sing before. . . .”

The crow really paid no attention to what the fawn was saying, but he did hear something about being deeply moved, so he calmed down a bit and managed to make a more conciliatory sound. But suddenly the fawn had another thought. Gathering up his nerve, he ventured timidly:



"Master Crow of the Red Beak, I don't quite understand why you always want to be with the lion. Will you tell me the reason?"

"What's so difficult to understand about that? But I will tell you: The lion is my friend, and whenever he feasts on an animal, he lets me have all the entrails. Do you understand now? For instance, your entrails, too, you silly little fool, will soon line my stomach. Hahaha!"

The fawn was very much upset by such talk, and could not help exclaiming: "If I don't die, I don't think I shall ever like listening to your songs again!"

"Not die? How could that be? My stomach isn't full yet, in case you don't know. . . ."

"You are wicked! If the other animals find out what you are, they won't like your songs either."



"And why not?"

"We don't like the lion, and we dislike the things that you think good, too. Besides, you sing merely so that you can feed on our entrails. How

terrible!”

Here the crow lost his temper again and loudly demanded to know: “Tell me — is my singing voice good or bad?”

“Of course it’s good.”

“Then that’s that. The worth of a singer lies in that only. You are a coward, you’re afraid of the lion and selfish enough not to want your carcass to become food for the lion and your entrails food for me; but you still like to hear me sing, because you admire my voice, and you don’t really think that soon I shall feast on you entrails! So what does it matter if I do?”

Just then, the lion made a sound. Immediately the crow stopped talking and started to sing. The fawn heaved a deep sigh and let his head drop.



## The Three Conceited Kittens

Once upon a time there lived a Mother Pusscat and her three children. Number one was a girl called Spot; number two was a boy called Brownie; number three was another boy called Blackie. And as all mothers love their children, Mother Pusscat loved hers, very much. She looked after them in every way, brought them up carefully, and sent them to school when they reached the right age. All three of them were in the same class.



They studied happily for a cat-term, grew fat and strong, and went home merrily to their mother in the summer holidays.

Of course Mother Pusscat wanted to know what her children had learned at school. One morning, talking after breakfast, she asked them: "Now, my children, have you been good kittens and done well at school?"

The three kittens' tummies were bulging with breakfast, and they felt full and happy. They half-closed their eyes, and with one accord answered proudly: "Oh *yes*, mum, we were wonderful!"

Brownie, who always tried to get in first, added immediately, "We've read heaps and heaps of books." Spot said, "We sang, and painted." Blackie followed, "And we did physical exercises too. Oh, we had almost everything in our school." Brownie chirruped up again: "We'll know absolutely *everything* in the world, if we keep on studying like this." Then Spot: "Goodness, yes. We'll be so wise." "Wise as wise can be," agreed Blackie proudly.

Mother Pusscat was pleased to hear this, of course, but she did wonder a little if they were being quite truthful, so, to test them out, she said, "What are you going to do then, when you grow up, with so much knowledge?"

"Prr'p! I haven't thought about that!" said Spot. "As long as I'm somebody important, anything will do for me," said Blackie. Brownie actually thought for a minute, and then said, "Knowledge is everything. People will honour us just for mastering it; we needn't do anything. I'm going to read lots and lots of books. I shall just go on going to school when I'm grown up."

Now Mother Pusscat thought most highly of the joy of labour, yet none of her children had spoken of that! She therefore asked another question, "Haven't your teachers told you anything about labour?"

*Labour?* Well, yes, the teacher had talked about it. But to tell the truth, not one of them had paid much attention. But the three conceited kittens were not a bit taken aback, and answered their mother readily.

It was again Brownie who spoke first: "Oh yes, mama. I know how the character's made, and I can read it. L-a-b-o-u-r." "Miaw, then!" sneered Blackie, "I can write it myself." "So can I!" exclaimed Spot.

Mother Pusscat still had a feeling that there was something wrong with her boastful youngsters. She was very much afraid that they had no idea what the word really meant. To make sure, because she was worried, she asked again:

"Yes, my dears, but can't one of you tell me what's good about labour? It's no good just being able to read it, or even to write it."

This time Brownie didn't open his mouth. Spot put her head on one side and mused. "Teacher spoke too fast, I couldn't keep up with him," said she.

"Well, there's nothing particularly hard to understand," — Blackie tried in vain to explain. — "It's something like doing physical exercises, isn't it? Or maybe not quite. . . ."

So poor Mother Pusscat realized that her children hadn't really studied very well at school. She was afraid that they'd just got their heads muddled up. She would have to think of a way herself that would make them go over their lessons during the holidays, and generally more clever. First, she felt, she must start with labour.

"Children, you all love to eat fish, don't you?"

"Why, of course!" Brownie thought it rather funny that his mother should even ask such a question. "I could eat three *huangyu* (which are small salt-water fish) at one go."

"I wouldn't eat that much," said Spot, "it would put me off my food. Two at a meal is enough for me."

But young Blackie shouted, "Oh, you must be different. I can eat five if I get the chance."

"My poor misguided children, being able to eat fish is nothing to boast about. It's catching fish that is worth doing. Now I think *you* should try to catch some today. *You* should do a bit of labour. If you catch any, we'll have fish for supper. Besides, I want to see if you *can*, any of you, do anything."

Brownie didn't want to understand what his mother was trying to do, and was silly enough to say, "Oh, catching fish is quite easy!"

"I don't think it will be too difficult," said Spot. "But we're so young, only kittens still. Why *should* we have to catch our own fish?"



Blackie wasn't going to admit that he was too young to do anything. "Pooh," he said. "We're not too young, so there. All right, we'll go to work, and catch fish."

This was the silly way the three conceited kittens agreed to do some labour. They set out immediately, determined to show how very clever they were. But they only thought they were clever; they didn't really use their brains at all. They wouldn't even ask for any advice, and in fact set off with just their bare paws, taking absolutely nothing to catch fish with!

And where should they look for fish? They saw not even a shadow of a fish, though they seemed to walk and walk for a long time. So they sat down to lay their heads together. Brownie vaguely remembered something he had read in a book, about fishes living in rivers, or maybe it was lakes or seas. How, then, were they going to find a river, or a lake or a sea? They had never been far from home before, nor had they ever seen a river, much less a lake or a sea. But they couldn't see any way out of it. They would just have to find one of them.

So they looked and looked as they trotted along, until they became really tired and hungry. At last they came to a little shallow stream on a hillside. "Hurrah," shouted Brownie in delight. "A



river! We've found a river!" "Clever, aren't you," agreed Spot. "It must be a river, it's not a lake or a sea. But why can't we see any fish in it?"

Blackie stared for a while and then he hit on something. "Good thing there aren't any fish in it, if you ask me, stupids. If there were any, how should we catch them?"

The three silly little kittens, standing there beside the narrow stream, were stunned. They couldn't think what to do next.

They were in a beautiful place. Clear water rippled in the stream. Nearby was a meadow dotted with flowers of all colours, and a bit further off was a wood, with its branches waving like hands. A gentle breeze was blowing, bringing with it the smell of the wild flowers. But the three poor kittens weren't at all in the mood to enjoy the wonders of nature.

"Let's sit down here, and wait. There *must* be fish in this river," said Spot.

"Yes, and when the fish come, we'll jump into the water and catch them," said Blackie.

"Well," said Brownie. "Let's sit down and wait a while anyway."

They were so tired that, fish or no fish, they simply had to sit down and have a rest. They gazed and gazed at the glittering stream, which dazzled their eyes, but they never saw any sign of a fish.

After a long while the three conceited kittens, feeling even more tired and hungry, began to pity themselves terribly.

Brownie, with his eyes closed, mewed in a tragic way, "How dreadful for us, to have to leave our mother and go out to catch fish while we are still so young!"

Blackie said, "I don't see much sense in this labour."

Spot said, "I feel like crying if I don't see a fish soon. But I don't want to be a cry-baby."

Now it so happened that a very old rat lived in the wood across the stream. As a matter of fact, he moved out there from the city because he was afraid of Mother Pusscat. Just at this moment he, was lazily snoozing under a tree, until the kittens' chatter woke him up. First of all he got a terrible fright when he heard cats' voices, and ran round behind the tree to listen to what they were saying. But very soon he recognized them for what they were — nothing but very ignorant little kittens! He stopped being frightened, and began to work out a way of tricking them. In fact, what he meant to do was to stop Mother Pusscat's plan working. After all, it would be bad for the whole rat race if kittens grew up clever and able. He was full of wicked ideas, so he thought them over, and chose one out.

The hungry kittens found that their thoughts were all about meals at home. Blackie now said that he could eat six fish at once. "Go on," said Brownie, "six is nothing. I could eat seven now. But where are the fish, and when will they come?"

"It's lovely to eat fish, but catching them is horrid," sighed Blackie. "It's even worse than doing arithmetic."

"I'd rather get low marks in an exam any day than catch fish," said Spot sadly. "We shouldn't have left our mother. Why should kittens learn to labour, anyhow? Besides, I don't see that we're ignorant, just because we don't know how to work."

"That's right." They heard a rather squeaky voice from across the stream. They looked over, and saw a grey creature sitting under a tree, nodding to them. To tell you the truth, they'd never seen a rat, so they were quite friendly, and asked, "Who are you?"

"I'm a learned person myself, and I enjoyed your talk very much. I wonder where such clever people come from. I'm sure you must all be very diligent students."

The three silly little kittens were very gratified to hear this and asked him to come over to their side of the stream. But the rat hastily shook his head. "No, no, I'm an old man and hate moving.

You're tired, too, I can see. There's no need for you to move either. We can go on talking like this. What you've been saying is very true. Take me, for example. As a learned person, I don't have to work. People who don't work can't be said to be foolish. On the contrary, they are really extremely wise people."

"Our mum says we should enjoy labour," said Spot.

The rat fingered his whiskers, and then said, "*You* should labour? Tut, tut. That's nonsense. In the first place, my children, if you have to work, it means using your hands, doesn't it? And doesn't that make you very tired?"

"Well, I don't feel tired when I do physical training," said Blackie, "but today I'm tired already, directly I start working."

"You can see how right I am!" said the rat with a nasty chuckle. He was so pleased with himself that he nearly moved across the stream, but he checked himself in time. "You're really clever; I knew it. All right then. In the second place, labour will make you all dirty. Look, if you jumped into that wet sand, wouldn't it make you in a dreadful mess?"

"Yes, indeed, and I do hate mess," grumbled Spot. "Today the wind and dust have made my nice green ribbon all dirty."

"What a shame!" said the rat. "And you such a pretty little kitten!"

But Blackie didn't agree, this time. "Look," he said, "I don't mind getting all sandy when I'm practising the long jump."

"Possibly not," said the rat slyly. "But what if it comes to catching fish in sand?"

"I won't do *that*!" answered Blackie.

The rat nodded. "There you are then. Catching fish in sand is dirty work. Labour is not good."

"But our book doesn't say that fish are to be found in sand!" said Brownie, rather surprised.

The rat peeped sideways at him. "Aren't you clever! Maybe *your* book didn't say so. But the book *I've* read says that fish may be found in sand. We need not argue about this, however, if we've settled that it's not good to work. In the third place then, hard work brings disgrace. Fancy kittens who have to catch fish for themselves! And the fish won't even oblige by coming to look for the kittens. What a shameful thing! You don't want to lose face like that, do you?"

"Of course not," said Spot.

The rat talked faster and faster as he got more and more pleased with himself. "And in the fourth place, my children, there's no freedom if you have to labour. Now you would be free, wouldn't you,

if you stayed at home, and just lay down on such a hot day as this. But you're not free at all if you've to come out to work and the fish you want to catch won't even come to you. And then fifthly, which is the last conclusion I want to draw, only fools work. Clever children don't have to. Why should they have to catch fish? If you're clever you can eat without working, not like stupid people, who have to *catch* the fish they eat. Isn't it just like the brilliant scholars who get top marks without even doing the arithmetic exercises, compared with those who fail to get top marks even though they've done all the exercises in the book? Tell me, am I right or wrong?"

"Right, right," chorused the three young kittens. They were so happy at hearing the rat's conclusions that they purred to him, "Oh, you are so clever. You are so good. Won't you tell us your name?"

The rat was also so happy at being so successful with his trick that he began to answer without thinking what it would sound like. "I'm Mister R. . . ." But he just managed to stop before all the word came out. "I'm, well, who am I? I'm clever Mister Whiskers, and a learned old gentleman. Clever children's manners ought to be better. Don't you know that you shouldn't ask personal questions?"

"Let's go home," said Blackie.

"But the fish! How can we get the fish! I don't think we ought to forget what mum told us to do, she loves us so," said Spot.

Brownie asked the rat, "Old Mister Learned, do you think we shall ever catch fish in this river? We've been waiting such a long time."

The rat pretended to be angry, and demanded, "How can you ask such a stupid question? I was thinking you were so clever. First, I've told you there's no need to catch fish at all. Secondly, I've seen plenty of fish in my life, but I've never heard that you have to catch them in rivers."



"Where are they, then?" asked Blackie.

The rat was really in a rage by now. "Why, in cupboards, and baskets. It doesn't matter if the baskets are high or low on the wall, you can get the fish quite easily. Fish can also be found in refrigerators — though I admit that those are difficult to get into because they're made of metal. All the same. . . ."

Whatever's all this about, wondered the three young kittens. Suddenly Spot thought she smelt a queer smell, and thought it came from the rat. She whispered to Blackie, "I can smell something queer." Blackie agreed. "I think I can too. What is it?"

The rat saw that they were now full of doubts, and checked himself quickly. "Since you don't seem to like my talk, I'd better take leave of you. I'm tired, very tired, and want to rest. Goodbye." He nodded hurriedly and slipped off into the woods.

So the three kittens had to go home without a single fish, but with three very empty tummies.

Mother Pusscat had dinner all ready for them. She was sure before she saw them that they wouldn't have found any fish. As they ate their dinner, they told her all about their adventures.

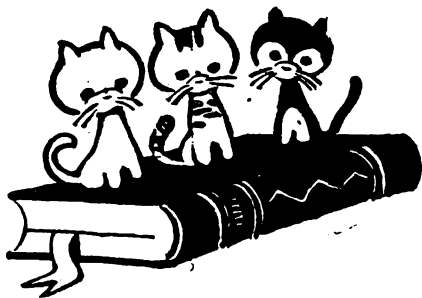
Mother Pusscat laughed as she said, "My dear conceited children, you thought you were already great, and you despised labour. I'm ashamed of you,



and your learned whiskered gentleman. You've been talking to a nasty rat. You didn't catch any fish, but you made friends with a rat and listened to his advice! Oh, whatever kind of silly kittens are you?"

The three kittens blushed right up to their ears. But of course you couldn't see it, because kittens have so much fur on their faces. They knew they were wrong now. They knew now that there was a lot of knowledge in the world besides what you learned from books. They asked their mother to take them and show them how to catch fish properly another day.

Since then they have learned ever so many things besides fishing. They have become diligent, hard-working, and *really* clever kittens.



## About the Author

Yen Wen-ching was born in 1915 in Hupeh Province. He started writing in 1935 and has written a lot of prose, short stories and tales for children. Between 1938 and 1945 he taught in the Department of Literature of the Lu Hsun Arts Institute in Yenan. Since the founding of the new China in 1949, he had been assistant editor-in-chief of the *Northeast Daily* and chief editor of the monthly *People's Literature*. He is now Director and Editor-in-chief of the People's Literature Publishing House.

His works include the novel *A Man's Sorrow* and the collections of tales for children — *Song of the Rivulet* and *Nan Nan and Uncle Greybeard*.



# THE THREE CONCEITED KITTENS

A Collection of Stories for Children

*By Yen Wen-ching*

This is a collection of five stories by Yen Wen-ching, a well-known Chinese writer for children. They include fantasy stories as well as stories about animals and plants.

The three conceited and lazy kittens did not know at first what a mouse was like, but later they became diligent and clever under the good care of their mother. Tang Xiaoxi, a boy who loved to play and did not wish to study, liked to wait for the next time whenever he was supposed to work. Only from his mistakes did he learn how to handle well his study and recreation. Stories in this book about the busy bee and how the earthworm turned soil loose for the plants will introduce young readers to the wonder of living on Earth.

These stories, told with absorbing interest, are highly educational and informative for children. The book is richly illustrated.

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